

ACTORS-

AND

PEOPLE

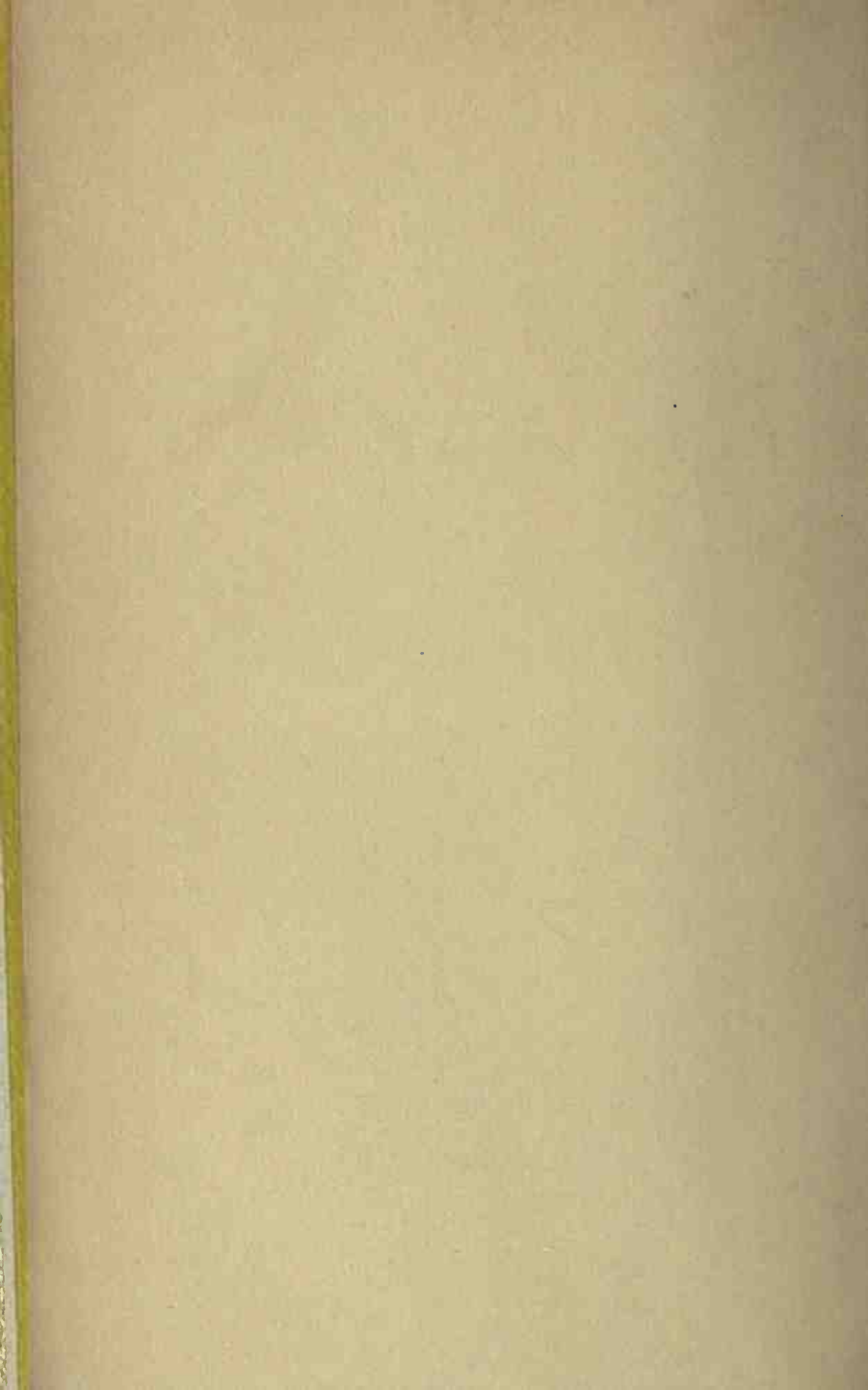


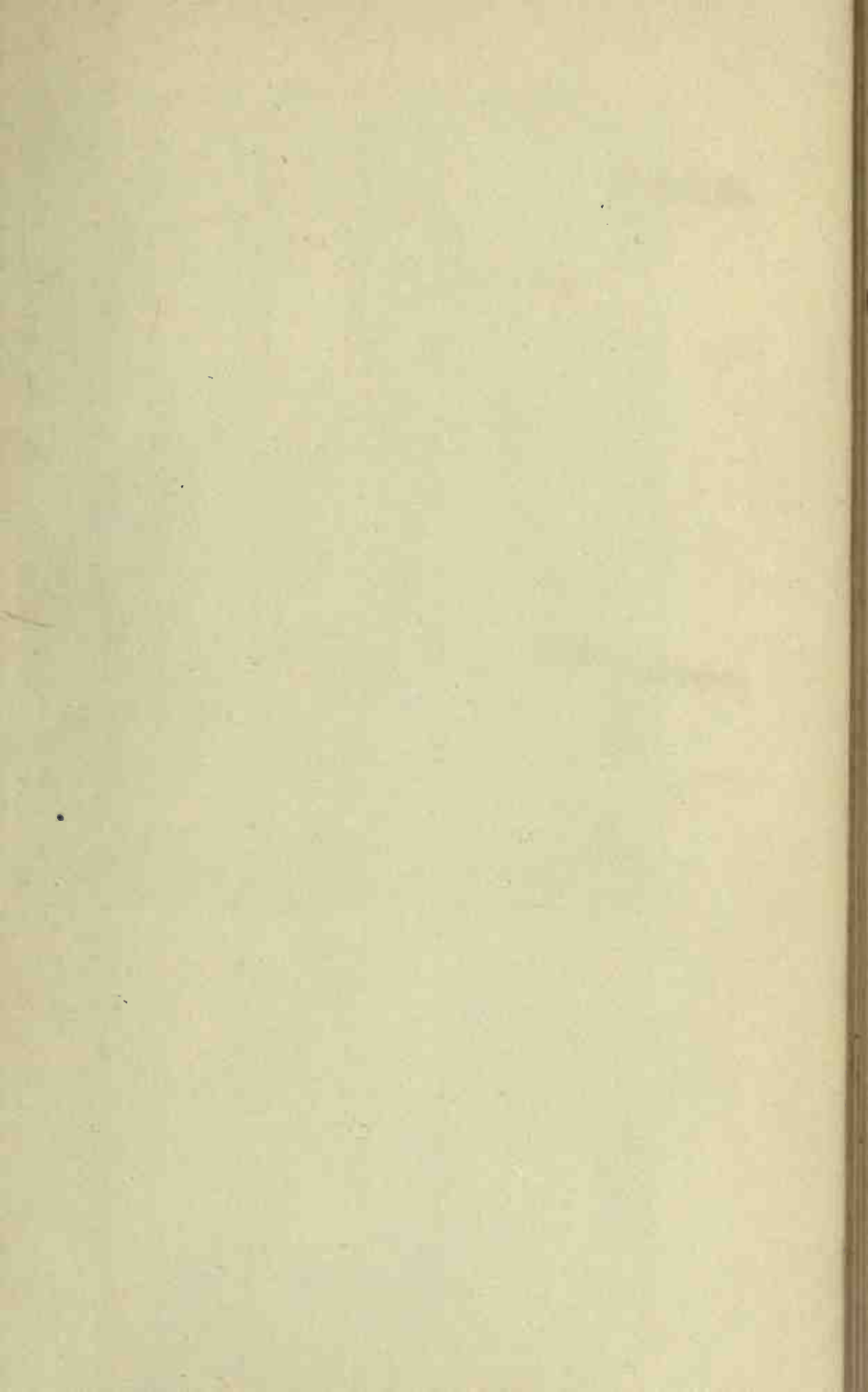
PEGGY WOOD





ACTORS—AND PEOPLE







From the painting by Leon Gordon

PEGGY WOOD
AS PORTIA IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

ACTORS — AND PEOPLE

BOTH SIDES OF THE FOOTLIGHTS

BY
PEGGY WOOD



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PREFACE

Books on the theatre ought to be written by gentlemen with initials after their surnames as well as in front, or by retired stars. But failing these perquisites I assure you these were not written in the spirit of pompous erudition, but rather in self-defense. I have answered so often whether it makes one feel like killing someone if one plays a murderess on the stage, whether actors get tired of playing the same part over and over every night, whether I enjoyed studying with Emma Calvé, whether Shaw was interesting really, and how does one get on the stage, that I was in a fair way to become voiceless. These essays have done much toward saving me, and now I shall have cards printed and hand them out upon each query, to the effect that the answers are, I hope, in the book called *Actors—and People*, published by D. Appleton, matinées Wednesdays and—no, no, \$2.50 at all bookstores.

There is one question I shall not be able to answer either vocally or in print, and that is one which rankles, too. I am always asked, "Do you write these pieces yourself?" Friend or enemy, sometime in the course of the conversation it will come out, either in that form or "Didn't your husband really write them?" My friends know I can't spell, so that may account for their remarks,

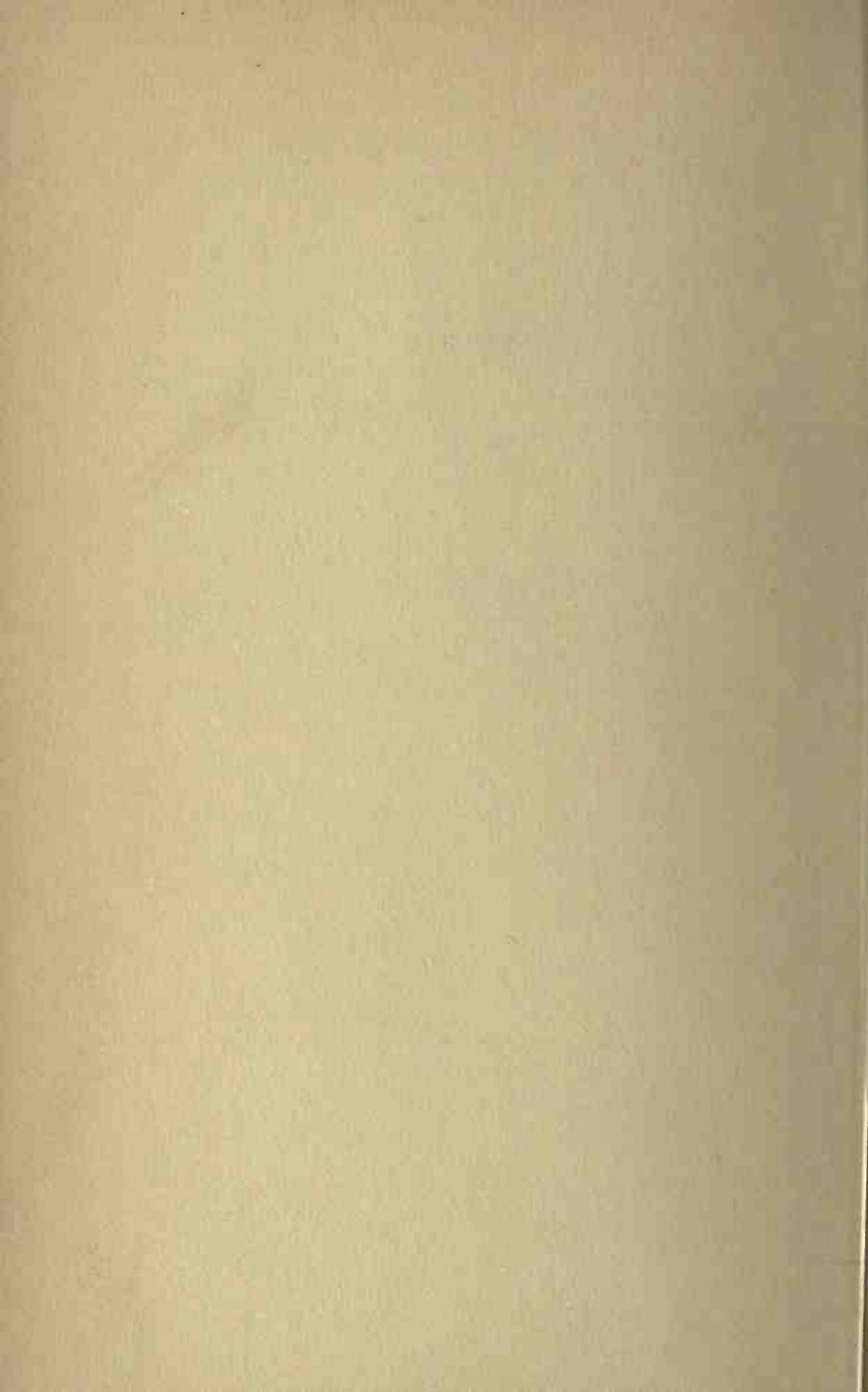
and my enemies are only too delighted, I suppose, to prove me a fraud—whatever the cause, the result is the same. I can only refer these unbelievers to the typist and the overworked proofreader who sorts and distributes my punctuation, revenging himself, so he thinks, by noting against the name Jed Harris—Broadway's Wunderkind—"unknown," or next the name of Col. Henry W. Savage—the producer of the first performance of "Butterfly" and "Parsifal" in this country, as well as "The Merry Widow"—"cannot be found in Army List." They'll say whether or not this actress-person wrote the stuff.

PEGGY WOOD

London

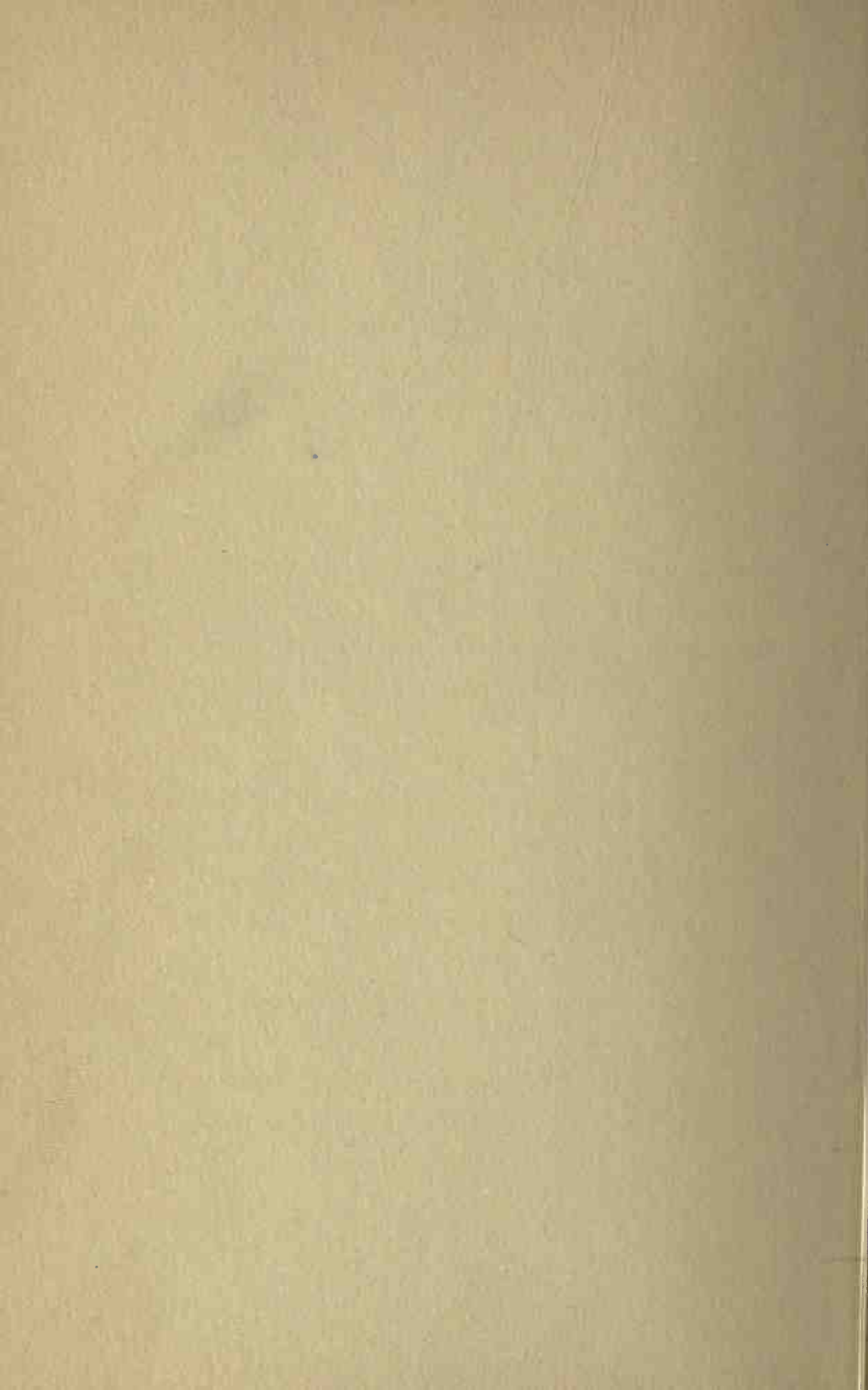
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I

BEARDING THE LAMB

DON'T forget now—those wonderful moonlit nights on Lago Maggiore with Bernard Shaw!”

The towering, slender figure beamed down upon me, and waggled a long finger at my stammering incoherence. We bundled into the hotel bus, turning back to wave once more, as he stood watching our departure. He disappeared into the back door of the Regina Palace Hotel. The bus lurched into the main road, and we looked at each other, wide-eyed, laughing a little sillily, tingling with delight, as after a plunge in cold Maine waters on a hot day.

“Well!” we said. “Well!”

We had done. We had seen him. We had seen and talked to George Bernard Shaw—or, rather, he had talked to us, which was, of course, much more important. And he was all we had ever dreamed of, to the *n*th degree, only more so.

All my young encounters with him, through my father's early appreciation of his writings; all the evenings spent listening to inimitable readings of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*—for we hadn't money enough to go to the

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theater, and anyway, no actor could have read the lines so well as my father—and all I had ever heard about him had contributed to a bearded image in which he was confused with Santa Claus, my father, and God. Imagined idols don't often come up to specifications, either in appearance or personality. But here was a case in which the reality actually improved upon the preconception. The Shaw that we had built up in our own minds from descriptions and interviews—even from his own writings—was only a cartoon compared with this Shaw of flesh and blood. We could only sigh with satisfaction, and breathlessly try to tell each other everything he had said from the beginning, to recapture the salt and tang of his personality.

We had planned, on going abroad, to come up from Italy to Nice, motor through to Paris, then to steal a few days in England for the express purpose of storming Whitehall. "For," we said, "Shaw is over seventy years old, and suppose something should happen to him! And he's the one person in the world that we most want to see."

But we didn't need to make the English excursion, because in San Pellegrino we encountered an elderly British maiden with a black velvet band around her throat and the sole distinction of having once attended a house-party where Shaw was the guest of honor. This meeting with him amounted for her to a career. She managed to lug

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into every conversation references to his appearance, what he said, what he did. She kept herself completely informed as to his subsequent peregrinations. And, hauling a current *Corriere della Sera* from under her arm, she pointed out to us triumphantly an article stating that not only was her great hero in Italy at that very moment, but not so very far away.

By ardent collaborative translation, we deciphered that Mr. Shaw, the dramatist, had left England for the summer; that he had never before visited the Italian lakes; that he was sojourning at the Regina Palace Hotel in Stresa; that he would see nobody; and that he went out every day with a book under his arm, Mrs. Shaw following discreetly, two paces behind.

We thanked the velvet-banded enthusiast, and set forth to do the hundred mountainous miles to Stresa in a wheezing Fiat. We stopped for the night at Lake Como, which turned out to be not the turquoise of our dreams, but a nasty, narrow sheet of lead, entirely surrounded by English-speaking tourists. The famous Villa d'Este was crammed, and immensely unimpressed with us. The streets, like the Boston Post Road in the summer, all bore the French name "Detour." The bells on the Swiss Frontier fence were apparently in good shape, but where were the Ringers? And not a single Family Robinson reared its ugly head. The only thing typical was the chauffeur, who possessed no bump of locality whatever, and, of course,

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had never before strayed outside his native village. The omens were certainly unpropitious.

With growing apprehension I polished and repolished my letter of self-introduction into a masterpiece of brevity, terseness, and humor.

"Suppose—" I thought, "suppose he's gone motoring for the day! Or fishing! Or swimming! Or picnicking!"

"No," I answered myself, "somehow I can't see him picnicking. But—he does swim."

"Oh," I wailed aloud, "and we've only got till three-thirty. We can't possibly miss that train to Genoa. Suppose—"

Just then a little voice inside said quietly to me, "Stop supposing, and you'll see him."

And as we drove into the hotel entrance, what did our delighted eyes behold but those famous white whiskers, blowing in the breeze. He sat upon the terrace, lunching.

I don't remember how I ever got out of the car. But the next instant I was leaping over ageratums and petunia-beds, my high heels sinking into the soft earth, in my mad rush toward the shrine.

I had some sort of an idea I would run up under the window where he was seated and cry, "Mr. Shaw! Oh, Mr. Shaw!" that he would look down at me standing in the geraniums and then—but from then on I had no plans. It was just as well, for he didn't see me and when I discovered there were two ladies lunching with him I

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thanked my poor breath-support and lucky stars which had saved me from so insane an introduction. Weakly I slunk out of the flower bed around to the front steps and tried to enter the hotel as a lady should, hoping the bell-boys wouldn't notice my shoes.

In the lobby I managed to find a desk where I added a line to the letter to say we were about to lunch, and that if Mr. Shaw would be so kind as to glance our way we would be so appreciative, found a boy to deliver it, watched him do so, powdered my nose, wiped the dirt off my shoes, and finally went in to lunch.

The dining room was empty except for Shaw's party and ourselves, but the maître d'hôtel, may his tribe increase, put us at the very next table!

I forget what we had to eat but Mr. Shaw was having fruit.

My letter was open on the table.

Somewhat like ol' Br'er Mink "w'ich he allus got one year hung out for de nooze" I overheard them saying, "Oh, yes, you remember, she played Candida in the States—"

Then Mr. Shaw reached the postscript and looked around.

"Here we are," I chirped.

"Ah!" said he, and came over.

We were amazed to see how tall he was. His lean, spare figure unfolded from his chair and towered over us as he came to our table.

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He was most cordial in the preliminary amenities and we were enchanted by his gentle air of kindness. Returning to his table he introduced us to Mrs. Shaw and the other lady.

In my letter I had mentioned a mutual friend, who, by the way, always tried to look as much like G.B.S. as possible, and who had invented some sort of dingus which, when attached to an electric light socket, proceeded to cure all the human ailments. He had written Mr. Shaw the year before that if ever I went to England he hoped I might have the opportunity of meeting the great gentleman.

Shaw's characteristic reply came back: "Send her along, and I'll be as nice to her as my nature will allow."

"Tell me," said Shaw, suddenly looking up from a green almond he was cutting, "is Gay's beard really turning black from these treatments he is giving himself with his invention?"

Not having seen our friend in more than a year I couldn't be sure.

"Well, he writes me it's so and assures me I can do the same. I must have a go at it."

I wondered if he, like my father, had watched the white come into his beard with helpless rage. Yet if that beard and hair had not been red in the days when he impressed on a stupid world the legend of his mountebankery, could he have cut so deep into its smug exterior had he been

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haloed then as now in hoary beauty? Or wouldn't the world have "respected his white hairs," the last thing on earth he would ever want?

A friend of mine meeting him in Madeira had talked to him about his persistent vegetarianism and asked him why he stuck to it.

"The answer is," he had replied, "that people who eat pork get to look like pigs just as people who work around horses get to look like horses, and I have no desire to resemble any animal."

Looking at his clear, pink skin and snowy locks my friend had smiled and said,

"If that's the case you must have been raised in a peach orchard!"

"I'll be down when you've finished your lunch," he said as he and his guests withdrew from the dining room. "Mrs. Shaw is retiring for a siesta. Have your coffee in the lobby and I'll find you there."

We were just finishing our demi-tasses when I spied him coming down the long, red velvet stairs.

"Let's go back to a little parlor I know at the end of the corridor and talk."

"Yes—the music—" we murmured.

"No, not that so much but we are liable to be interrupted here."

How tactfully he put it: that people would be staring, listening, introducing themselves (like us), that there

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would be all the annoyances of the gaping crowd which he attracted by his very appearance. And in the same phrase he seemed to include us somehow in an inner circle where he and his friends moved, initiate, superior; he made us feel his equals. I thought of the "celebrities" of the Younger Generation group whose "line" was to be as rude as possible on all occasions and compared them to this man, who has been the gad-fly of the British nation, supposedly the rudest man on earth, yet he could take the trouble to be kind to such overwhelmed members of the weaker sex as we whom he had never seen before.

"Well!" he said, cordially, and apparently interested in the answer, "what brings you to this part of the world?"

"I am on a sort of sentimental journey," I answered. "Italy isn't my objective really, it is incidental to a motor trip up through the country in the south central part of France where I became engaged. I am going to call on our fairy godmother, Emma Calvé."

"Calvé?" he exclaimed, his face lighting up. "Where does she live?"

So we had to tell him about her château in the desert of southern France. He was tremendously interested in hearing about her native surroundings, of which he said he knew nothing, but mainly was he interested in the woman herself, for he had seen her so many times in his early days as a music critic, and was her ardent admirer, both as a singer and an actress.

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We recalled his review of her Carmen in *Dramatic Opinions and Essays* to which he added something on his remembrance of her Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

"A strong, peasant thing she was in it. Vital, but stupid. Duse had done the play and made the girl weak and equally stupid, but you didn't blame Turiddu for leaving her for some more flamboyant type whereas I imagine he would have had a pretty poor time getting away from a woman of Calvé's build and temperament."

He began to chuckle.

"I am thinking of the first time I ever saw her. It was in Dublin. I had just got the post of music critic and the opera season was to open with a piece by that man who wrote *Manon*, what was his name?" He snapped his fingers. "You see I am getting old, I can't remember names. Oh, yes, Massenet. It was a one-act opera beginning with a terrific battle. I can't recall the title of it just now but it opens with a cannonade in the midst of which the prima donna bursts onto the stage and announces she has killed the general.

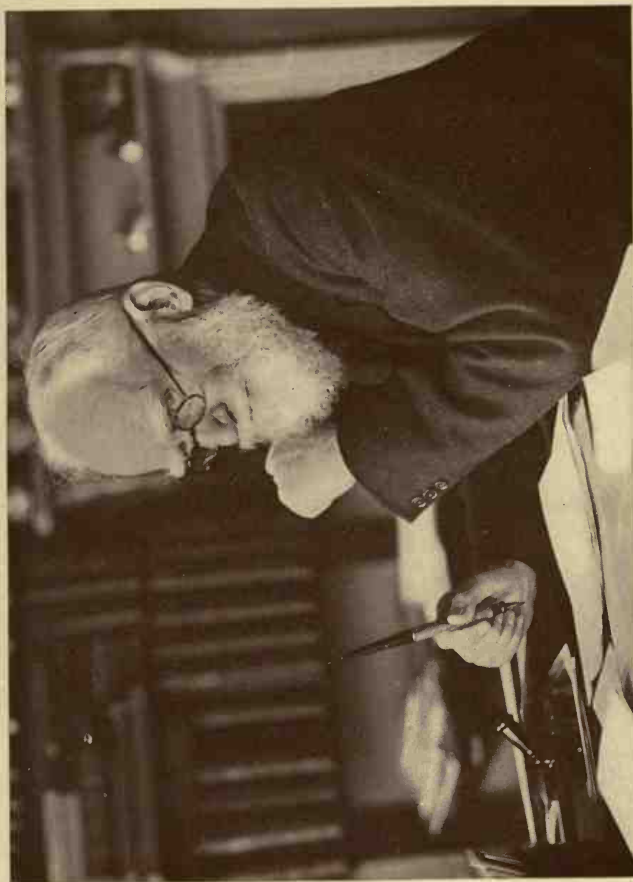
"As an actress," he continued, "you must know that a cannonade either on or off stage is always a difficult thing to handle; the smoke is sure to appear and there is danger of panic from the fearful in the audience. Moreover, the shots fired always do something unexpected. Well, it seems a man presented himself to the impresario of the

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season saying he had invented a contraption, which he displayed—it was about the size and appearance of a suitcase—assuring the manager he could reproduce all the sound and fury of battle, without any of its discomforts, and asking for a trial in the forthcoming opera. Rather bored, the manager turned him over to a stagehand with instructions to take him out in a vacant lot somewhere and try this arrangement. The stagehand did so and reported that it worked. Whereupon the man and invention were engaged for the grand gala opening.

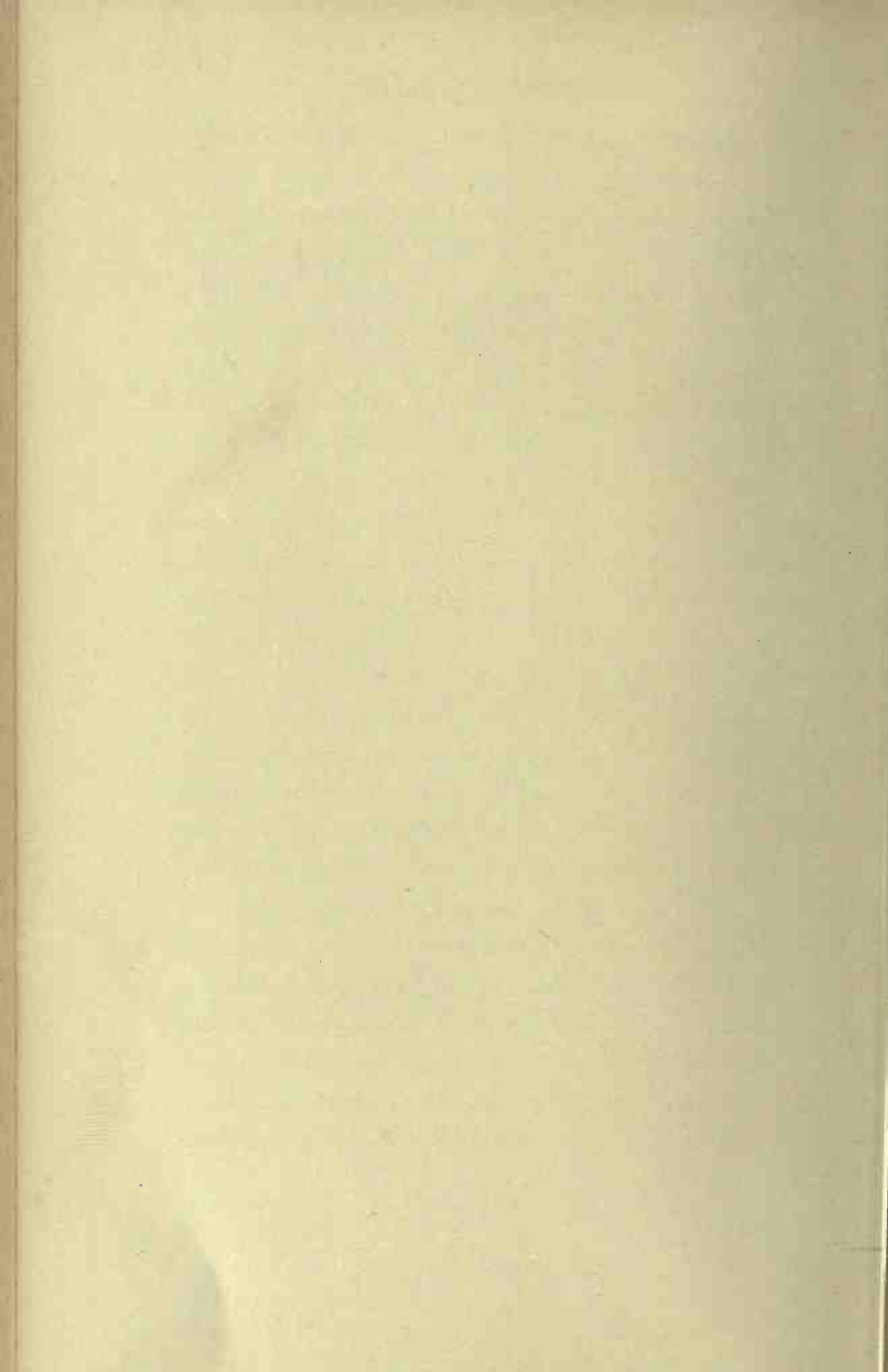
“The house, of course, was packed, the overture began, the curtain went up, the man was given his cue and turned on his suitcase. Oh, it worked all right; that stagehand had been quite correct! Such a bombardment you never heard! The audience was thrown out of its chairs in a panic, the windows of the opera house and those of every dwelling within a radius of six blocks were shattered, the police turned out—and in the midst of all this Calvé shot out on the stage singing, but of course utterly inaudible in the pandemonium. Ask her about it when you see her.”

(We did and she replied she didn't remember it. “You see,” she said, “I was so wrapped up in what I was doing—the rôle was written for me you know, *La Navarraise*—that I neither saw nor heard anything. The opera house could have tumbled down around me and I should have gone on singing!”)



Photograph from Wide World Photos

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



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"What happened to the inventor in all this?" we asked. Shaw chuckled again.

"When the débris had settled they looked for him, you may be sure, but no trace of him or his suitcase has been found from that day to this!

"So you've been playing my *Candida* have you? Tell me about the production. And tell me why you gave up musical comedy to play straight drama."

This last remark quite took my breath. How on earth could he have known that I had been a musical comedy person in a land far across a sea he had sworn never to traverse! How could he be informed on a matter which must have been trivial to him, without a secretary to prime him? Think of having a mind where everything is ordered and the required information pops out on demand!

I was so floored by this, that I couldn't for the life of me tell him any plausible reason for leaving musical comedy; but in a moment, the talk had turned onto the Actors' Theatre production of his famous *Candida*. He was as interested in their setting and casting of his thirty-year-old play as if it had been his latest.

Seemingly pleased with our report, he was reminded of a production of this same play, which he and John Galsworthy had witnessed in Scotland, in which the leading lady had also been a musical comedy person—the sort of breezy, hearty kind who made every entrance straight to the footlights, facing the audience, body a little bent for-

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ward, and arms hanging from the shoulder as if ready to go into her dance.

"Something like this." He unfolded quickly, got up, went to the far corner of the room, and marched briskly toward us, for all the world like Beatrice Lillie about to sing, "March with Me."

"Well, sir," he resumed, folding up in his chair again, "they played Prossie's intoxicated scene in the last act for rip-roaring farce. Lexy, the Curate, was portrayed as a rolling drunk. Prossie could hardly stand. Burgess hic-coughed. And the audience yelled. I turned to Galsworthy, saying the play was doomed; they could never pick up the thread of the drama after that. But do you know, the audience was breathless after their exit, and sat rapt until the end of the play.

"And once, in Germany, I saw a repertory company do it. The juvenile, cast, of course, as Marchbanks, disregarded completely my directions as to appearance, and dressed the part in the manner of a *matinée* idol—spats, fancy waistcoat, a pearl-grey ascot, and a monocle. A slight variation from my instructions—remember them? 'In these garments he has apparently lain in the heather and waded through the waters, but there is no evidence of his having ever brushed them.'"

We assured him that Richard Bird, in the New York production, would have pleased him completely as to his costuming. And as for his performance—how stirring and

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truly fine it was, how full of subtle flashes, too delicate sometimes to cross the footlights, yet galvanizing in their effect upon his fellow-players.

"For instance," I said, "there is a place during the scene of Candida's choice between her husband and the poet, just after Marchbanks has made his offer—" I fumbled for the exact lines.

Instantly, Shaw supplied them: "My weakness—my desolation—my heart's need."

"Yes," I went on, thankfully, "and Candida answers, 'That's a good bid, Eugene.' Bird used to do something there which couldn't have got over the footlights except, perhaps, by telepathy; he allowed a tiny smile to flick across his *mind*. Sometimes it showed in his eyes, sometimes in a twitch of his mouth. It revealed to me, as Candida, Marchbanks' conviction that he had made a good bid. It was one of the finest examples I have ever seen of living the very emotions of the character."

Shaw nodded, delightedly. "Of course, of course!" he said.

"But then how could he help living it?" I said. "The whole play is so modern, so alive!"

He twinkled his eyes at both of us. "And yet I am now 'Poor old Shaw.' So academic, so old-fashioned! That's a strange experience for me, my children. You infants can't imagine what openings of my plays used to be like. Cat-calls, boos, people getting up and haranguing—small

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riots, like the original Wagner opera premières. But now I have become *vieux jeu*—what's worse, a sage, my God! A sage! Having reached seventy without being struck dead, I am now—venerable. Something to be revered!"

He spoke vehemently, but with a whimsical twist to his white, bushy eyebrows, and passed a long, thin hand over his snowy hair. The hand returned to his knee, and I noticed with a catch in my heart that it trembled a little all the time. The well-spring of youth shone in his eyes, his walk was firm and sure, his voice delightfully Irish and virile just as I knew it would be, but Time showed there in his right hand, inexorable, invincible, destroying. How could it! Had it no better sense than to try to use up something of such great value to the world! Why not take his own suggestion in "Back to Methuselah" and let him live three hundred years to complete his work? Keenly aware always of the shortness of life, he had been forced to make his points by prodding, poking fun and stinging the truth into the world's thick hide of complacency and has therefore built up for himself a reputation of buffoonery, sarcasm, smart-Aleckery and tremendous irreverence of the Sacred Established Order of Things. It will take longer than his lifetime, unless Time relents, for the world to understand the real love of humanity in that heart, the kindness, the *Weltschmerz*, the search for truth and beauty which is the essence of the real Shaw.

We spoke of Sybil Thorndike's Saint Joan, and the news that Emma Gramatica was to create the rôle in Italian. This reminded him of a correspondence he had been having with the lady and her manager concerning the forthcoming production. The translation had been made and Shaw had been invited to attend the première, also to give his reasons, for print, of course, why he considered the lady eminently suited to play the great Joan. He declined to go to Milan or wherever it was to be, and replied that as to the Signora's qualifications for the rôle he couldn't say, for he had never seen her. Whereupon the press agent promptly announced that George Bernard Shaw had written *Saint Joan* expressly for Italy's Emma Gramatica, and that she was his ideal for the part!

"Oh, but that isn't a patch on what a Russian actress did to me!" he laughed. "She came to London to meet me, and a tea was arranged by her friends but unfortunately the poor lady came down with a serious attack of flu on the appointed day and was confined to her rooms in the Savoy. Having only a few days more of her leave-of-absence from Russia she wrote imploring an opportunity to talk to me during the next three days. I went to her hotel then, listened to her ideas of how she wanted to portray Joan for a half-an-hour, contracted the worst case of flu I ever had in my life from her germ-infested apartment and, as soon as I was well again, dismissed her from my mind. About four or five months later I received a

manuscript from the lady who said she hoped I'd read it, and that if I cared to add anything to it, of course I was at liberty to do so. This document set forth the following truths: that the one way to ever really understand a man of genius was to be with him twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four, to eat with him, walk with him, talk with him, in fact to share every waking and sleeping hour. "This is what I have done with Bernard Shaw," she ended!"

Of course I wanted to know what his addition to this statement was. To my surprise there was no wise-crack, no slaying, devastating, Shavian reply which she would have remembered, even in her sleep. He had simply told her agent that she mustn't use the article, that one didn't allow that sort of thing.

"The *Corriere della Sera* says you are writing or considering writing a play about Saint Francis of Assisi," I said. "Are you really?"

"As you may have gathered from the foregoing anecdotes people and newspapers say a lot of silly things. I am neither writing nor considering writing. I am on a holiday. Besides, if I should write a play on another saint it would much more likely be about Santa Clara than her friend Saint Francis. Have you ever been to Siena?"

We hadn't.

"Go there sometime, for in that ancient church which is really three churches in layers, one on top of another, you can see her."

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"See her?" we gasped.

"Actually. The woman herself. Not her relics, a little finger bone or a sacred veil, but her body preserved by some sort of atmospheric freak such as happens once in a while in parts of the world. She lies in a little crypt or cave with a grating at the opening. She was evidently a fine, full-blooded figure of a woman, capable and interesting. I should like to write about her sometime."

We made a mental note of a pilgrimage to Siena.

"Now then, what else have you done besides Candida?"

I told him I had had the great privilege and fun of playing in the Players' Club revival of *Henry IV, Part I* in which Philip Merivale, who had played in his *Pygmalion* both in England and America, had also appeared. Merivale had told me so much of his own admiration for Shaw that he had fired us the more to see him.

Shaw smiled his recognition of the man and praised his ability as an actor.

"But I must tell you of some of the difficulties and trials of the early days of *Pygmalion*. We nearly never got it on," he added.

"You mean the censor felt a little shaky about your using a certain word?"

"Oh, that, of course! But added to that we had Mrs. Campbell's conviction during rehearsals that this was the worst part she had ever played and that it would ruin her career. She couldn't get out of playing it, and she couldn't

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make head or tail of it. Towards the final rehearsals she began to take it out on the furniture and every time she came near anything movable she shoved or pulled it viciously out of her way. As a consequence the rest of the cast were stumbling over stools and chairs and sofa cushions strewn over the stage in most unexpected places.

"However," he continued, "my friend the stage carpenter and I remedied that at the dress rehearsal by stealing into the theater on the night before and nailing down everything lighter than a grand piano!

"The next day I sat far back in the gloom of the theater and hugged myself every time she tried to yank a poor inoffensive chair up by the roots!

"But, of course, this did not improve her state of mind and the second act curtain fell upon Mrs. Campbell advancing to tell us with all the command of language which is hers at such a moment that this was without doubt the silliest play and the worst part of her entire career and that come what might, she would rather die than play it. The curtain rose for Tree's and my notes and criticisms, Mrs. Campbell's mouth opened to begin her denunciation when suddenly a strange woman burst out of the wings with outstretched hands crying, "Stella! Stella! This is the best thing you have ever done. My dear, you are made all over again!" It was some friend of Tree's whom he had asked to the rehearsal, some blessed woman whose name I never knew.

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"Mrs. Campbell's expression changed slowly, she smiled as the woman caught both her hands in an ecstasy of praise. The day and the play were saved.

"Now I don't vouch for this, for I don't remember a thing about it, but Tree, who always loved to tell stories on me, swore I leaped up on the stage and did a war dance around Mrs. Campbell howling, 'I told you so! I told you so!'"

Whereupon he illustrated by springing from his chair and dancing around it, clapping his hands like a delighted child, his beard waving and his coat-tails flapping.

That enchanting sight I shall surely treasure forever! Indeed how could I ever forget the picture of his boyish glee, as, laughing and shouting he showed us how he had been revenged and saved by a "blessed woman's" enthusiasm at the crucial moment. I do believe he would have turned a handspring too, if that had been included in the story!

The porter came at this moment to announce that the bus for the Genoa train was leaving in five minutes. Five minutes! And there were so many, many things I wanted to ask him. Of course I was utterly tongue-tied and cast myself upon the hope that he would go on doing the talking.

He saw and understood our embarrassment and continued chatting easily of this and that, but it is all a jumble in my head now. Except I do remember he told us he

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had written the part of Lady Cecily in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* for Ellen Terry and had sent the manuscript to her to read for production. Unfortunately, she always had her maid read her new manuscripts to her and the maid, unused to Shaw's style, didn't think Miss Terry would like it much after trying a few scenes, and anyway Miss Terry was extremely tired that day and ought to take a nap. So the play never was read, and therefore never accepted. Later, when Miss Terry saw it she felt most dreadfully and commented sadly on how we let the important things of life slip away from us in trivialities.

The time to go had arrived. We walked back down the corridor trying to say in futile phrases how kind it was of him to see us, to let us break in on his holiday, that we appreciated the hour and a half more than we could say.

He turned to me suddenly.

"Miss Wood," he said, "are you going to go home to America and write an interview on 'How I lived with Bernard Shaw'?"

I was quite terrified for a moment, and assured him hastily I wouldn't *dream* of such a thing!

"Why not?" he laughed. "You are an actress, aren't you? Well, you must have *réclame*, newspaper articles and all that. Think of how you could burst into panegyrics: the beautiful Italian lakes, the sunlight, the moon-

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light, the starlight; sailing, sailing, twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four!"

His eyes crinkled and he laughed benignantly.

We climbed into the bus. He stood waiting for it to start, like a charming host at the door of his own house.

We had a moving picture camera in our laps. We looked at it and each other. We shook our heads. No, we would not ask him.

I wonder if he can ever know how real a tribute that was. It would have been such fun to have had that to take back with us, to be able to show others less fortunate than we just how he had looked on that day.

But we couldn't; we just couldn't.

I was almost afraid to write about him before, mainly because of the spectre of that Russian woman, also from some fear that I might put down on paper hallucinations of my own particular brand, engendered by a contact with genius rather than flu germs. But in the lapse of time and the long foreground of four thousand miles I begin to believe that meeting G.B.S., from a feminine point of view, is far from bearding a lion and more like finding Santa Claus whiskers on a lamb!

II

THE IMMORTAL GYPSY

THE dreadful vaudeville orchestra blares the theme of *Carmen*, the curtain rises, the front-light man focuses an amber spot at Left Center, where the special drop opens, and there into its radiance moves a new radiance, with black eyes glowing, black bobbed hair glistening with the sheen of health no amount of brilliantine can ever give, black-and-gold gown shimmering, red lips curved into an enchanting smile—and Emma Calvé greets another audience. Carmen, at sixty-two, returns to America, the scene of her greatest triumphs, for a short tour in the two-a-day—and knocks 'em cold again.

Once more the beauty, gayety and insolence of the immortal gypsy flame across the footlights unimpaired by the years, as Calvé flaunts her orange shawl, and we who never saw "the greatest of Carmens" at the Metropolitan Opera House in the days when the world spoke of nothing else, catch our breaths in wonder as the tango rhythm of the Habanera flings its challenge again to her. What are sixty-two years? Who cares for *embonpoint*? What difference if this is a Friday and the tenth show of the week? There, before our amazed eyes, is a vivid something created

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in her imagination and projected into our lives that has nothing to do with time or space.

So lightninglike is the coördination of mind and vocal instrument, so rightly does she color each phrase with her thought, that even a radio audience could not fail to grasp her meaning as quickly as one which can see the flash and swing of her head and hear the snap of those mobile fingers as they simulate the castanets.

And that ability is no mere happenstance. She knows how she does it. In the mist gathering in my eyes before so brave, so valiant an artist, I see another scene with that same Calvé as the central figure, with but three pairs of eyes to watch. It was at a morning lesson in the salon of her castle in the south of France, where, from ten to twelve, she undertook to give us some inkling of her uncanny knowledge of the theater and singing.

She had not been well that day, but she did not shirk her task.

"They have all said, 'Oh, Calvé is too temperamental to give regular lessons; you will waste your time with her.' But it is not so. I love to teach, I have agreed to give you your lessons, and besides, I am interested."

So that day she leaned against the piano wanly, arrayed in a blue cotton robe an Arab woman had given her in Egypt, and which she had unearthed from one of her forty trunks to use as a model for an evening wrap to be done in cloth of gold for the coming season, woolen

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stockings and old snake-skin shoes, listening to one of us sing the Garden Scene from *Faust*.

Suddenly she raised her head and said: "No, no, my child; not a bit like it. The notes, yes; but they are not all-important. Listen. Marguerite is young—no more than eighteen—she is simple, she is poor; she has never had a well-dressed man speak to her before in her life; she thinks about it, and in the phrase where she wonders what his name is she betrays the beginnings of love. These things you must think in your mind, then your voice, hands, face, and everything will help you tell the audience. Watch me."

And she began the whole scene from the moment Marguerite enters thinking of her encounter with the handsome stranger. The blue cotton robe disappeared, the sick woman disappeared, age and all melted away, and in its stead was a girl whose voice was young, whose hands were young, whose every movement was youth. Her expression when she saw the casket of jewels, her preening before the imaginary mirror—and I, the only one really of the theater in that tiny audience, realizing what I was seeing, sat on the huge silk divan and blubbed, it was so beautiful!

She stopped in the middle of a phrase: "*Ca y est*," she said. And indeed, there it was.

"This business of thinking is very important in singing," she continued. "It must be subconscious as well as conscious thinking. By one you put yourself in the mood, and by the other you let the mood influence all you do.

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In the first place, never appear before an audience saying to yourself or in your manner, 'I'm good, I am. Just listen to me and you'll hear some gorgeous singing.' That, my dears, is fatal. Your audience will resent it. They want to be the ones to tell you whether you are good or not. Deny them that right, and no matter how well you sing, they will think you a stuck-up thing and stay firmly away from your public appearances. Therefore, never let on how good you know you are! No, come before your audience bowing a little hesitantly, as if to say, 'How do you do? I am glad to see you. Are you glad to see me?' Then stand before them simply—and by the way, don't ever wear a fussy dress in concert, but have it made on as near classic lines as is possible with the current mode—take in the whole house—gallery, boxes, stalls—as if to greet them. Don't fawn on your public or try to be coy; be simple. When I greet my audience I bear myself as if I were saying, '*Je ne suis qu'une petite fille de Dieu*—I am but a little child of God—as we all are. What I have to offer I think is good; I hope you will think so too.'"

She stretched out her arms in a wide gesture, her eyes turned upward to an imaginary gallery.

"Take them to your heart and they will take you to theirs. Make them feel you are happy to be the medium by which they are given pleasure, and do it in simplicity and humbleness of manner. If you do not do this you may sing like an angel out of heaven and get two or three

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hand spats for your trouble. Do this and"—her eyes twinkled—"you may sing like the devil himself and bring down the roof! For from the moment you establish that contact with your listeners, you, instead of they, become master, and far from being dependent on their good will, your moods are their moods and they must do as you say—or rather, as you think."

We were only three that year to listen, but I felt as if all the concert artists and actors in the world ought to have been tuned in, for here was an analysis of charm, the secret of handling an audience, of preparing them for your interpretations.

This was like receiving the tablets of stone, for it was one of the world's greatest actresses talking, as well as one of the greatest singers. In fact, Mrs. Fiske declares that the two finest actresses of our time were not, as the man in the street might say, Duse and Bernhardt, but Duse and Calvé.

Certainly she took the operantics out of grand opera and put in acting. Thanks to her Santuzza and Carmen, we are spared the semaphoric wavings of pudgy tenors and even more pudgy sopranos, whose fat arms described circles in the air in response to the demands of their lungs for more wind with which to lambaste the high notes rather than to interpret the emotions of love and terror. Ever since Calvé swaggered her way across the stage in run-down, high-heeled slippers to toss a rose at a startled Don

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José, it has been up to the rest of them to go and learn to act. Why, nowadays it's a poor show if the Carmen doesn't knock a tooth or two out for somebody and leave a handful of her own hair in someone's clutch.

I wonder if opera singers don't sometimes give vent to hearty curses on the head of her who has caused them all this extra work for the same pay. Still, there is the consolation that if they haven't the ingenuity to learn how to do it by themselves, they can at least go to the past and present mistress of the art and find out how it is done.

I was fortunate enough to spend a summer at the Château de Cabrières, and the experience was unforgettable, from the first meeting with the great prima donna at a luncheon given by a friend in New York, who suggested I might possibly arrange to study with her, to the last glimpse of the castle through the rain as our train chugged over the mountains toward Paris at the end of the summer.

The day I arrived at Cabrières she was showing the castle to sight-seers, glorying in her rôle of chatelaine of a famous edifice, seeing herself as the last of the Sieurs de Cabrières and these her vassals come to pay her court, with no trace in her face or manner of the terrific domestic scene which had gone on the day before, brought about by the servant of one of those innumerable relatives who infest the French family. She had been disturbed enough then to state that there would be no lessons that summer, she simply could not do it, she would wait until I ap-

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peared, for I was en route, then she would dismiss everybody. But when I arrived all was serene; she decided we should all go on a delightful excursion far up the Tarn River to a beautiful old castle, where we should eat the most delicious *écrevisses*; in fact, see them caught for our delectation, for the castle was now an inn. In short, we were to make it a gala day.

We were very gay and she told us the history of the eight portraits painted on the spandrels of the vaulted room where we ate; how the original owner had had eight daughters all so lovely that when suitors came to woo they never could make up their minds which they wanted and always went away in despair, so that the eight damsels lived spinsters to the ends of their days.

Thanks to this amusing interlude, all thought of discontinuing a summer's lessons was dismissed, and the next morning—and a morning begins for Calvé at five, when she arises—she started in on the regular routine: lessons from ten till lunch, marketing and study in the afternoon.

Marketing in France is a new experience to anyone who has ever kept house; meat must be used the day it is bought, for there is no ice; vegetables are kept in a cool cupboard, and the bread and cakes from the *pâtisserie*—whose owner is an old friend of madame's, with whom she always spends a gossip hour in Millau, where she goes for provisions—are stored in another cupboard, of which she keeps the key in true chatelaine fashion. The *vin*

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ordinaire which is used every day is made from the grapes of her own vineyard and kept in kegs in still another cupboard, and the water is piped down icy cold from a spring up the mountainside. Surely the builders of such a stronghold thought of everything, for with water from that spring and plenty of provisions they could withstand any old siege. Even if the attacking party were smart enough to sidetrack the mountain rill, there was always the cistern in the central court, well protected from poisoners.

Small wonder then that this romantic castle should have appealed to the imagination of Emma Calvé when, as a child, she was taken to see it as one of the sights of her part of the country, or that she should have startled her little peasant playmates with the announcement, at the ripe age of nine, that one day she would own it and carry the keys to its rooms on her belt. Nor should we be surprised to find that with her first great financial success she fulfilled her own prophecy by buying Cabrières—which means, translated, the Place of the Goats—and filling it full of the beauties it deserved.

Last summer, having lost a great deal of money in the collapse of the franc, for, very patriotically, she always invested her money in France, she felt she would have to give up the castle and put it up for sale. It was a bitter decision, and she, with the true Frenchwoman's love of the soil, suffered keenly. But fortunately the place is

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so far off the beaten track from Paris to the south—why, even French people— Well, just try to make the P. L. M. office understand you want to go to Millau in the department of Aveyron, and no matter how good your accent, I'll bet four cents you come away with a ticket to Milan. Luckily, I say, this is the case, and so no sale was made, to her intense delight, for now her last vaudeville tour brought her three thousand dollars a week!

May we all earn that at sixty-four!

"Now, *ma chère*," she said the other day, "I keep Cabrières for always. And I am doing such things—you should see. I owe my home, in the first place, to America; now America lets me keep it. My lit-tle home."

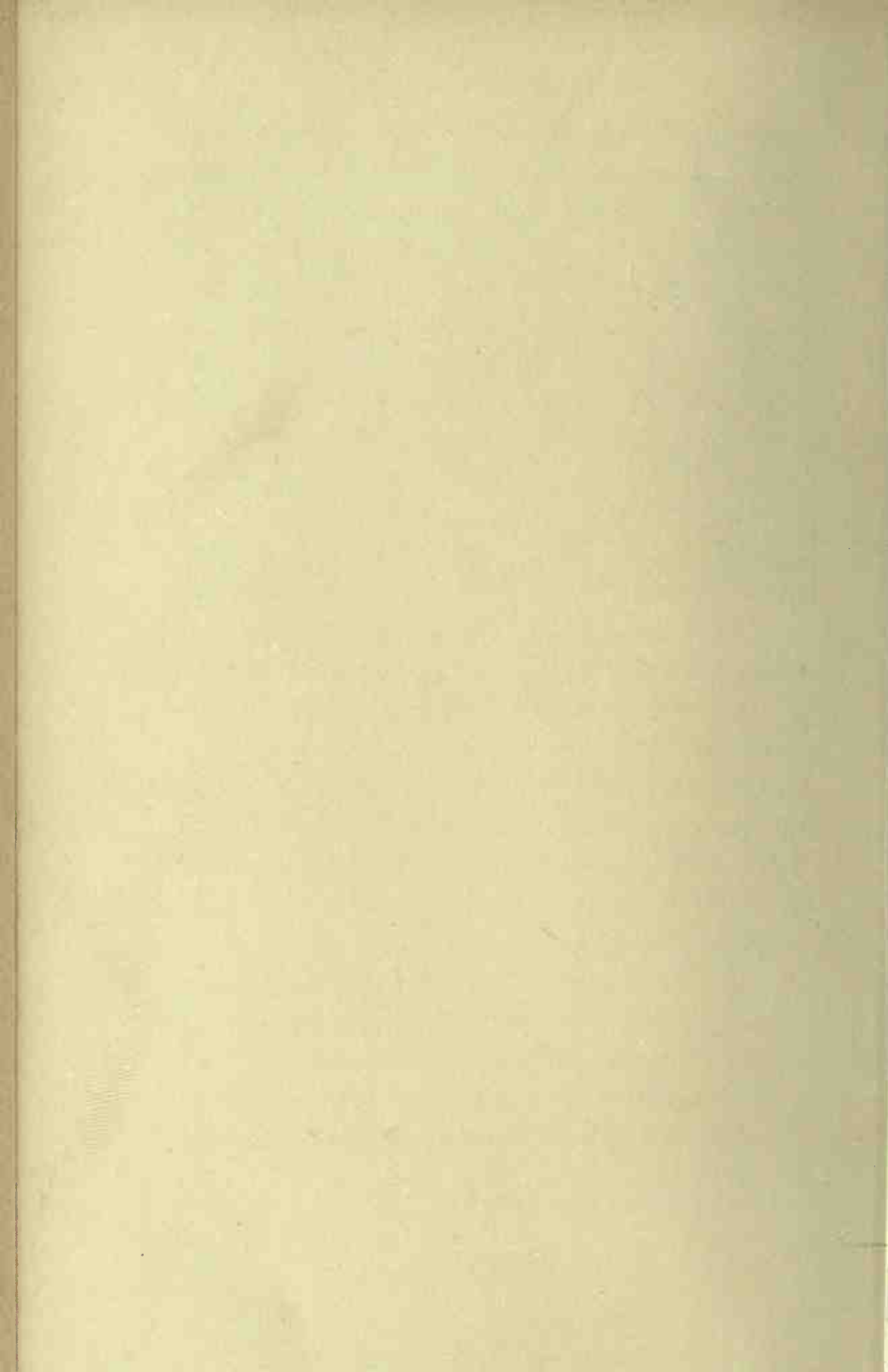
She spoke in English, for there is no French word for "home."

So the ancient *salle de gardes*, with its six-foot walls, hung with armor and chain mail, its low roof of Roman vaulting—that is, the round arch and not the groined Gothic kind—with its cavernous fireplace, will ring again with the laughter of young students and the thrill of Calvé's voice as she interrupts her *déjeuner* to illustrate some song, beating time with a crust of sour peasant bread. And upstairs in the salon the famous portrait of her as Carmen will still blaze like a living thing among the treasures in that beautiful room, while the original—herself—will once more sit at the piano putting those same students through their scales, and all will be as it has been. The



MADAME CALVÉ AND PEGGY WOOD

In an amateur movie written by Madame Calvé in which she appears as the irate mother defending her son against the wiles of a vamp.



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gorgeous embroidered satin cover on her piano will still hold the photograph of her teacher, Madame Laborde, and the *cloisonné* clock that doesn't go but sports an enamel of the Winter Palace surrounded by brilliants, which was given to her by the late Czarina, will still be there. The girls who await their turn—for when I was there we all three took our lessons together; each learning from the others' lessons as well as our own—will sit caressing the ivory *bibelots* madame has collected in her world tours; and when the scales are over and the songs and arias taken up, Calvé will once more explain how to deport oneself before an audience or how to color one's voice to interpret a song.

"There are three main divisions in the coloring of tone," she says. "There is the warm, rich, heavily colored tone for the somber emotions; the light, gay sound for more joyous occasions; and the neutral tone, which is just clear vocal sound on pitch, without any emotion at all back of it. I use it for narratives. For instance, when I sing *Le Roi Renaud* I have three persons to identify to my audience: Renaud, who is dying, his mother, and his wife. Renaud's words must be sung in the neutral tone, with the suggestion of a groan to express his extreme fatigue and agony; the mother's voice is indicated by a heavy, middle-aged quality, dark with the emotion over her son's death, yet with a forced calmness as she lies to the wife to keep that news from her; the wife's voice must be light

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and eager, and the narrative part sung in a purely neuter tone. All these, of course, in the degree you wish to express yourself. The words themselves do a great deal of the coloring; you cannot sing 'somber' in a gay, lilting voice, nor can you sing 'gay' in a dark voice without sounding a little silly.

"The swiftest coördination in the world is between thought and the organs of speech, which are of course the same as the organs of song. So swift is it sometimes that the voice betrays what you are really thinking, though your eyes and face may say something very different. A great detective once told me that a man may school the muscles of his face to Oriental placidity under strain, but his mouth will always tell the truth in some way. And, since the lips are the final control we have over the sound we emit, let us pay particular attention to the mouth. When I listen to a person talk I never watch his eyes, for you may prate to me as you will about the expression of the eye, I don't believe the eyes express a thing except as the muscles of the face change the contour of the cheeks. Smile, and see what it does to the skin around your eyes; open your mouth in surprise and note how that pulls the eyes open too. But does the eye itself change? Not at all. Therefore I say, watch the mouth when someone talks to you; therein lies the real character, the real personality.

"You American girls who are such good linguists should

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pay more attention to your mouths, for control of the lips is essential in beauty of speech. Lip rouge won't help if your mouth hangs slack, nor does anyone care a rap to listen to an actress who prunes and prisms her lines."

How she teaches you to use that mouth, how she gets you to use breath and all the other things are of course what you pay her to tell you. It wouldn't be fair to under-sell her by writing it here, would it? And besides, I could never tell it with all the salt of her own experiences.

You who may be one of those to go to France to study with her this summer will probably arrive in Paris eager to be on your way south, but I must warn you again, you will have your own sweet time getting to your destination. About noon you will reach Aguessac, the station on the Chemin de Fer du Midi nearest Calvé's home, and descend from your *couquette* well-worn and hungry. The hot sun of the Midi will be at its height, but the refreshing roar of the Tarn River hard by will make you forget that. Madame or her chauffeur will be there to meet you, and you will drive the three kilometers to the castle along a white, white road, blazing in the noonday sun, until at last you will see a rocky crag like most of the rock formation you have noted during the morning on the train; only this will gradually resolve itself into two great cylindrical towers and the various roof levels of castle, terraces, farm buildings and a tiny chapel nestling close, with its multicolored steep roof of Spanish tile glistening in the sun. Directly

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under this, and a thousand feet below, the motor will turn into a private road and climb the zigzag way straight up the side of the cliff, emerging at last to the park gate in back of the château, the only entrance. Every foot of the way could be commanded by a watcher in the castle, and even should the enemy by some miracle get as far as the park and the very entrance of the building itself, he could never enter, what with boiling oil and other things that could be dumped on him at places conveniently arranged by the architect back in 1070.

It will be strange country you will see as you gaze about—a silent, melancholy country, barren and rocky; not at all like the smiling fields of Normandy and the Loire Valley. You are in the Causses. Try that word on your traveled friends and watch them look blank! No matter how they may brag to you of how well they know their France, be assured you've floored them flat, for it's a safe bet they've not only never been there, but they never even heard of them. Well, just explain that the Causses are mountains, and that you don't mean the Cevennes either. If they still look bewildered tell them that they connect with the Alps on one end, the Cevennes on the other; the Cevennes then run more or less to the Pyrenees, and thus you have a link between Switzerland and Spain. Furthermore, you must say that they are bleak plateaus from fifteen hundred to thirty-five hundred meters high, almost treeless and without water. Roman roads run across their

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flat tops and eagles walk around the fields as you drive along. Yes, they do, too; I've seen 'em.

If these now-gaping friends want to know anything more about this queer place, refer them to two marvelous volumes by S. Baring-Gould called *The Deserts of Southern France*; then, if they want to know who he is, tell them he wrote the words to "Onward, Christian Soldiers," after which they ought to be pretty impressed. I don't know where they will get these books, however, for I fear they are out of print. Somebody, whom I won't remind of it, lent them to me, and I haven't the slightest intention of ever returning them. Just try to get them back is what I say!

But Emma Calvé is perhaps better equipped to tell the fascinating history of these mountains than Mr. Baring-Gould, even though he climbed down their subterranean caves. She can relate much more dramatically why the Tarn—which should be a bigger river than it is, according to its tributaries—is small in some places and big in others, shallow here and deep there, as it slips away under the cliffs of the gorge to fill great underground lakes; how the very name is a relic of the Hundred Years' War, the English having called it by the word the Scotch use now for river—tarn. And perhaps she can be prevailed upon to tell you how she has done more than anyone to advertise the beauties of the Gorges Du Tarn, finally, through her efforts, getting the government to open up a road along

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the river instead of depending for transportation on the flat-bottomed boats poled up and down the stream between the orange and red cliffs, which rise sheer to two and three thousand feet, a miniature Grand Canyon. Now, there are organized motor trips from Paris itself to see these scenic wonders, but for years she was indeed a voice crying in the wilderness. No Californian was ever more proud of his state than Calvé is of her *pays*, only she knows its history, its romance and its people. She will warn you to look out for a Roman coin or ring or bracelet when you wander over the fields, for her farmer has plowed up many; or she will explain to you that the language she spoke to that old peasant woman a while back was the patois of the country.

"And yet it is more than a patois," she said, "it is a real language—the *langue d'oc*. It was once the court language of France, and one distinguished between it and the French we know now by the differentiation in the way one said 'yes'; French was the *langue d'oïl* and this was the *langue d'oc*. It is a combination of Old French, Provençal and kitchen Latin—not the literary Latin."

The woman is an amazing linguist as well as an encyclopedia. She even speaks Basque, let alone the patois, French of course, Spanish, Italian and some English. Moreover, she is well acquainted with the literature of all these languages, and as for folk songs—she will sit out on the west terrace after dinner and sing them by the hour.

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Spanish gypsy songs, Italian street cries or shepherd songs of her own mountainside—the whole world is translated into music as far as Emma Calvé is concerned. It is her life, her religion and her philosophy. Nothing exists for her except as it is related to music. And Roman history became a real and vital thing to me when I heard her sing a shepherd song that was once a Roman trumpet call, when Millau was the ancient Æmilianum Castrum—Emil's Camp.

I had heard it first at her concert in Carnegie Hall, where it roused a frenzy of applause, but of course did not know either that it was a folk song or that she had collected it. But here in its proper setting it was breath-taking.

We sat on the stone parapet oblivious of the drop of a thousand feet to the valley below, where the mysterious flickering lights of the crawfishermen moved along the narrow stream, vying with the shooting stars which are so plentiful in the Midi in the month of August.

The night was still, for the wind usually dies down at sunset, but even if it hadn't, there were no trees for it to sough through up there on that bleak crag. Far down the *côte*, as they call the side of the mountain, the white ribbon of the road to Aguessac lay close to the Causse Noir, silent and lonely, for there is no traffic at night. A sheep bell tinkled somewhere in the darkness, and Calvé cupped her hands to her mouth to send the long, long notes echoing from rock to rock. What Roman trumpeter might not

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have stirred in his Gallic grave to hear those clarion tones of a familiar call? Or was it the ghostly voice of the shepherd who first made that call his own by sending it ricocheting to his neighbor on the next plateau which tossed back those echoes? Ghostly it must have been, for the shepherd down the hill who watched his flock by night had a horrible voice and sang only *café chantant* unpleasantnesses, to madame's disgust.

The last note died away and the night was once more still, the mountains inscrutable. There was no frenzy of applause this time, yet she drew a long breath of satisfaction.

"I love this country," she said at last. "It is so silent, so strong. No matter where I am in the world, I must come back here every year. From it I get my strength."

If that is her secret I was glad to know it, for at six the morning before, she had decided to rearrange the furniture in her room and had dragged heavy *armoires* in and out for hours. May I have such strength at her age! And not content with that, she had spent the afternoon rummaging in her many chests of treasures for some marvelous Louis XV silk she had had made up into a bed covering; she wanted it to decorate the room of a young lady who was coming to study. She had arrived at dinnertime and was then upstairs unpacking.

In a few minutes the young mademoiselle appeared on the terrace carrying a guitar. She explained that the guitar

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was to show madame how she had learned to play in two lessons, with no knowledge of the instrument, simply by placing her fingers on certain frets the way they now mark the ukulele chords on a piece of popular music. She had a great gift of improvisation and could make up songs by the yard, which she proceeded promptly to do.

Whether it was that madame did not want her to do much singing before she had really begun her studies, or whether she thought it a little presuming on the part of the young lady to usurp the spotlight in the presence of the three Americans who, after all, had some names of their own in their particular *métiers*, to say nothing of taking it from the great diva herself, or what was the reason, I cannot say; I only know something precipitated one of the most amusing incidents of the summer.

It didn't begin amusingly at all, for after half an hour of the three guitar chords and the young lady's voice shooting up and down, we were pretty thoroughly bored, though Calvé had tried several times, with no success, to turn the attention to other things. Failing the gentler amenities, she finally began to cough, and kept it up until she had worked herself into a real spasm; in fact, a good deal more than she had bargained for when she set out on her performance.

Soon she was forced to go indoors, and in a moment we heard a great commotion, her brother excitedly calling the

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servants as madame staggered up the stairs to her room, which opened off the central court of the château.

We exchanged glances of consternation, the lady with the guitar ceased operations, and suddenly, with one accord, we all flew into the house and upstairs as fast as we could go. I, like the beloved disciple, got there first, just in time to see Calvé burst from her room onto the open gallery, draw a glass of water from a tap in the wall that looked more like a shrine than a piece of plumbing, choking all the while, and crying, "*Je meurs! Je meurs!*"—I am dying! I am dying!

In vain her brother insisted that one didn't die like that—one died in a bed. She stuck to her story. By this time the entire household had arrived and was standing gaping at the scene so dramatically taking place in the light of a single candle.

Suddenly she looked up, saw us all agog, and ordered us all away, slamming the door of her room in our faces. But we had got no farther than the top of the stairs before she flung the door open again to ask if we were going to leave her there to die. Everybody jumped to her assistance and in the confusion I gathered somehow that she wanted some cotton.

I had no idea how cotton could help a choking fit, but mine not to reason why; down I flew to my own room, where I knew I had some in my first-aid kit. Did you ever try to worry off a good-sized hunk of absorbent cotton

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in a hurry? You might just as well worry off the end of a plank with your bare hands.

Well, somehow I got it off and dashed back upstairs, to find that the ensemble had adjourned to madame's room and was augmented now by all the servants, one of whom added a tiny brass lamp with an open flame, like a miner's lamp, to the light of the one feeble candle. Somebody had preceded me with cotton, and the use to which Calvé was putting it left me with my jaw somewhere in the region of my breastbone. She had removed her gown and was standing in her silk slip, while in front of her was an array of what looked like jelly glasses. Holding one in one hand, she took a piece of cotton—a small piece—lighted it by the flame of the lamp, threw it into the jelly glass, clapped it to her chest and there it stuck! The French people of the household didn't seem much surprised, but we from across the water all but dropped in our tracks. This operation was repeated three times across the chest, each time the flesh bulging up into the jelly glass as the vacuum made by the pinch of burning cotton was established, holding it just where it was clapped. Suddenly she thrust one into my hand to put on her back, and I can never tell you the appalling sensation of having the thing stick there as if it had been a leech! Two more went on her shoulder blades and she retired to her boudoir bristling with these glass wings. I couldn't decide whether they made her look like the goddess Isis or an airplane motor!

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But at least we now knew the worst of the coughing fit was over and there was nothing serious to worry about.

The reaction from the whole thing was so great that the three of us made a break for the *salon* and had a plain case of hysterics. I have often heard of rolling on the floor in an agony of laughter, but this is the only time it ever happened to me. Finally, when we could resist the mental picture of the jelly glasses long enough to get two consecutive normal breaths, we asked each other what in the name of the Rockefeller Institute were those glass contraptions anyway, and wiping our eyes we decided to go find out.

We braced the girl of the guitar, who got it through our heads that that was a perfectly normal procedure, that one always had a set of the things in the house, that they were in the nature of counterirritants, and that we should see they would completely cure madame.

Suddenly one of the girls—the young widow of a famous New York doctor—saw the light: “It’s dry cupping, that’s what it is! I’ve heard my husband tell of it. Great Lord, we haven’t used it in America since the Civil War!”

She then endeavored to explain to them that such things had long been discarded by the medical profession of the New World, along with bleeding, but they gave her the twisted smile of pity for such lack of knowledge. Who were we anyway but a lot of ignorant foreigners? The idea of telling the Old World how to do things!

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Well, perhaps they knew best, after all, for the diva was up bright and early next morning consulting in the kitchen with her cook about the marketing and menu for the day, none the worse for her heroic treatment of herself, and showing only the bruised spots where the cups had left their marks as a record of what might have been extremely serious.

I have since noticed that all the foreign chemists' shops do carry those jelly glasses, and am thinking of collecting a set the next time I go abroad.

Shortly after this episode there was much activity on our part, for we were nearing the fifteenth of August, when a fête was to be given in Millau by the department of Aveyron in honor of a native poet, François Fabié, and the *affiches* all stated that not only would the world-famous Calvé sing for her countrymen but *ses élèves* would also add to the festivities. And these same pupils were boning hard every morning on a piece by Reynaldo Hahn which called for four voices.

We had done our bit very well one day, I remember, and full of the *joie de vivre* or something, I burst forth in an expressionistic dance while my co-workers finished the morning's labor with that duet of Mendelssohn's we know as I Would That My Love. The French words have a lot to do with a pretty river and nodding flowers on the bank, so I suited the action to the word, as it were, thereby letting myself in for considerable hard work, for madame

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saw me, and from then on I had to do it for all the guests who came to the castle and finally for the show itself. The Millau paper, the day after, allowed as how they had been treated to some very pretty gestures by a fair unknown, and I guess that about covered my one and only appearance as a *première danseuse*.

The day of the doings was even more busy, for in the morning I noticed, coming up the steep road, a little delegation of young men, the leader of whom bore a large bouquet. They had left their bicycles at the foot of the hill, but still wore the clips around their trousers legs. By the time they had reached the entrance to the gate, Calvé had put on her prettiest frock and stood on the east terrace waving them a welcome.

"Who are they?" we whispered.

"These are my children," she replied. "During the War I was their *marraine*. I took it upon myself to try in some way to help the families left destitute by the loss of a father or brother, and these are some of my godchildren. This is my fête, too, you know; this is my birthday, and they never forget."

They had reached the great iron-studded door now and entered, gasping a little from their long climb and with the embarrassment of having to make their little speeches. The leader bowed stiffly, presented madame with the fast-wilting bouquet which he had clutched firmly before him all the way, and congratulated her on her birthday. The

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others grinned moistly, and when the time came cried "*Vive Emma Calvé!*" with tremendous gusto. She accepted the gift as if it were from a king, and made a most lovely speech of thanks, whereupon they shouted "*Vive!*" once more, and we all went into the dining hall to drink her health before they made their bows and escaped down the hill.

By five o'clock the house was in a turmoil; madame had ordered supper for that hour, since she was to sing that night, and of course it wasn't ready. However, she was—and had been since four—so she occupied the interval until supper was announced by closing up all the doors and windows so that no robbers could get in. At half-past five we were all bundled into the cars and started off to Millau, where the fête was to be held in the open-air theater. First we were to go to the apartment of a friend of hers, where we would receive finishing touches to our make-ups and meet the quaint old woman who had been Calvé's benefactress in her youth, who cares for her as if she were her own child, and was, at the moment the car deposited us on her doorstep, engaged in curling the diva's hair.

At last we were all ready, and we three girls sallied forth to see what we could see. It was still daylight, so we found our way to the open field where a tiny theater, hardly bigger than a Punch-and-Judy show, had been rigged up and decorated with real boughs, instead of the canvas ones I was so accustomed to. The populace was arriving on

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foot, by bus from the more remote parts of the province, and by bicycle. All the family came, and, though there may be a lot in the papers about the smallness of the French family, when all the relatives get together they certainly make an imposing aggregation. We were immediately the object of their attention, for we had a foreign look and the small boys gathered in a circle, staring as only French children can stare. Finally I asked one of them if he thought we were a zoo, at which sally he giggled and squirmed, but went right on staring.

We were very interested to see what this festival would turn out to be; and I wonder how many places there are in America the same size that would have a town orchestra brave enough to attempt some things of Gounod's, the *Arlésienne Suite*, and other things of the same musical caliber. They had a man do a monologue in the patois, wearing the traditional red bandanna and stiff black felt hat, who sent them into stitches—it was maddening not to understand what he was talking about, and yet we got a much better idea of the sound of the language, because our ears weren't cluttered up with the meanings of the words and we could hear the rolling, rugged vigor of the phrases which poured off his tongue until our senses were thrilled by the sound of it—the town boys all piled upon the stage to sing songs in the patois, and at last Calvé recited a poem of the little man for whom they were giving the fête—François Fabié. Gloriously her fine speaking

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voice gave out the verses—she had rehearsed it at home from the east terrace, making us go way down in the park to be sure we could hear her—then she brought on the poet himself, a frail, middle-aged man with a little beard, who bowed to his countrymen, talked to them of the beauties of their mountains and read some of his poems. Then—ah, then came the great moment when the pupils did their stunts, which were greeted with polite applause, and the stage was Calvé's.

The next day the festivities moved nearer home to the village of Aguessac, for of the three days set aside for fun, Aguessac's day was the feast of its patron saint, the Virgin, and the whole town turned out into the one main street. There were funny races and sort of Halloween games for young and old, including a game where they stretched a string across the road from tree to tree, and hung, somewhere along in the middle of it, a frying pan whose bottom was smeared with thick black grease in which was embedded a five-franc piece. The idea was to stand upon a table with hands tied and get that five-franc piece out with your mouth!

Suddenly a shout at the other end of the street rose, and down the road lickety-cut came what looked to be a house on wheels; in fact, was a house on wheels, which drove up to an open field and proceeded in what is known as a trice to unlash and erect a tent, fit together the sections of what turned out to be a loop-the-loop for one bicycle,

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assemble an audience, dash on some clown white and give a show—a tiny two-men-and-a-woman circus. The only music they had was the drum which the woman beat—she couldn't roll it for the loop-the-loop effect, so she just beat it louder as the clown made his loop, finishing out the door of the tent. But the village audience didn't seem to miss anything. Real mountebanks they were, driving their little horse and cart from town to town following the summer fêtes, *jongleurs* doing their stuff on the feast day of the Virgin. Here was what we of the theater had all come from, and I found my eyes wet to hear the mother-in-law joke, the local allusions, and to see the clown socked on the head with a bladder stick.

They had one very cute trick with which they ended the entertainment—what vaudevillians call “the wow at the finish”; the *patron*, or boss, of the show rigged up a springboard and did some jumps over a barrel or two, then he got three little boys to bend down while he jumped over them, then four little boys, and then five. This impressed the audience considerably, but he announced that he would now, as a special added attraction, jump over ten little boys. Everybody went “Ooo-oo-o-o!” and his assistant corralled the urchins.

As soon as he had ten he told them to bend down in line, but to hide their faces in their caps, because, since it was a tremendous feat, of course they would be scared and perhaps would raise a head while he was jumping over.

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They all hid their heads dutifully, not noticing that the assistant had been giving rolled-up newspapers to five other little boys who, when the "*Allez*" signal was given, ran into the ring and paddled those ten upturned bottoms with yells of delight.

That night we brought the holiday to a close at the castle by celebrating Calvé's birthday, which we couldn't do the day before on account of the concert, with a dinner party at which we all appeared dressed in the costumes of her famous rôles. She dug them out of trunks and we arrayed ourselves according to our types; I was Manon, in pink satin and brocade; one girl who had beautiful long blond hair wore madame's yellow chiffon robe for Ophelia; the other, a dark-eyed petite person, wore Carmen's shawl and green skirt. The French girl reverted to her own Turkish trousers; her mother wore another Manon dress and powdered her hair; Calvé's brother wore a mandarin coat, and her nephew took some of the chain mail off the walls and did himself up in that; and last of all, madame made a grand entrance in the trailing cloth of gold and jewels of her costume for Messalina—a part she never played in this country.

I wonder what the old castle must have thought as we gathered around the great refectory table in the dress of all those centuries? How many times before, it must have seen panniers such as I wore, medieval draperies such as Ophelia's, and heard the shivery sound of chain mail! It

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had nothing to say about it, however, and stood as inscrutable as ever, silent, brooding, and, I always thought, a little sinister, as if to say, "I can swallow you all up and no one will be the wiser. You could all disappear, as have those others who wore such clothes. Stranger things than that have happened here."

But these were only fleeting thoughts that crouched back in the shadows; around the candle-lighted table Calvé surveyed all her selves and was moved to answer our congratulations of her forty years on the stage by rising to toast America, to whom she owed her greatest successes and her home. She lifted her glass and suddenly began *The Star-Spangled Banner*, which was sort of an anachronism when you think of it; but I'll say this: She knew the words!

Four years later I returned for a brief visit just about festival time to find another set of *affiches* on the walls, announcing that Emma Calvé would sing at the fête for the national musical instrument of the mountains—the bagpipe—and the lady herself gathering together her music and accompanist preparatory to setting off for the little hamlet of LaGuiole, where she was to sing for her neighbors and countrymen. Of course I trailed along with mouth and ears open, the better to listen to her travel talk as we went: Here to our left was Rodez, the capital of the department, where, next to the Gothic cathedral, was the famous Place Emma Calvé which she gave to the town,

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singing a whole year in concert to pay for it; but at least she had saved the ancient houses and the square itself from being demolished to make room for modern buildings; over there was the beautiful valley of the Lot, and up here a well-known whey cure. She was a regular Baedeker all the way to the village where she was to appear.

And when the time for the concert came she stepped up on a small platform erected in the school and gave a program of eighteen songs, ranging from folk song to César Franck, giving as much to her audience gathered in that little hall as ever she gave at the Metropolitan or Carnegie.

She had been so delighted with one old bagpiper in the contest that she had requested him to bring his red velvet *Dudelsack* to her concert and perform with her. He was in for more than he thought, however, for she got him to dance the *bourrée* with her after she had finished singing, saying to the crowd:

"I have watched you today in the square and you have forgotten all the quaint figures of our national dance. Let me show you how my grandmother taught me!"

Light as a feather she tripped across the stage, all hint of weight lost in the grace of her movements. Charmingly she pretended to flirt with the now completely flustered old gnome as she danced the figures, until at last she burst out laughing, and grabbing the poor chap around

the neck, planted a large kiss on his cheek and fled from the stage as the mob roared.

We left her there with people crowded around her.

"I can never say again, 'Come see me at Cabrières,' my dears," she said as we prepared to leave. "When you return to France it will belong to somebody else."

But if Emma Calvé has brought anything to America in the years past, or is doing so now, America has returned the compliment by giving to her, in the first place, her beloved castle, and by allowing her to keep it. She has a villa in Nice for the winter months, when the Causses are cold and covered with snow, but always in the summer you will find her—that is, if the Chemin de Fer du Midi will let you—in her grim, austere home in the rocky deserts of France. From there she has set out on all her gypsy-ing, and back there she has returned from all her triumphs.

One night in New York I was bidden by a sudden telephone call to a farewell party to be given to madame, and thinking of course she was about to set out on her tour west, I asked her when she would arrive in California.

"California? *Mais, ma chère*, I am sailing tonight at midnight on the *Paris*!" she cried.

"Sailing?" I said, stupidly.

"*Mais oui*. I am going back to France. I have changed everything, canceled the rest of my tour—everything. It has all happened in the past few days. You see, it has been arranged that I give two farewell performances at the

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Opéra Comique, of Santuzza and, of course, Carmen, after which I am to do the same at Covent Garden in London! But what makes me happiest of all"—she gripped my hands—"is that I am to be made a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur in January! I was notified a week ago, and that is really why I am flying back."

Gayly we toasted her, madly she ran into another room to fling a cloak around her and gather together her bags and possessions. Twice she lost the keys to her trunks, three times made false starts toward the door, only to be stopped by more friends who wished to say good-by. Finally, with her arms full of flower boxes, purse and the train of her gown, she rushed off after kissing us all, singing her farewell, bubbling with the joy of living, and dashing off to her new adventure with all the zest of her indomitable youth.

I am sorry for California, but—*Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, salut!*

III

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I SUPPOSE glamour is the reason for it, whatever it is that glamour means exactly. At any rate the light that shines from out a battered door up a dingy alley, though neither rosy nor bright, seems to attract to it whirling motes of stage-struck humans trying desperately to enter into its magic radiance. Magic it must be, for even those who pass in and out of that door seem to gather a sort of halo which in turn attracts its own gallery. And the vibrations caused by the sight of Miss Ina Claire leaving the theater after the *matinée* or Mr. Glenn Hunter looking in a shop window are more than likely to send little Gladys or young Robert home burning with an ambition to go on the stage, that they, too, may some day sport a halo and cause little clots of worshipers to coagulate at stage doors and in front of box offices.

Of course, there may be thousands of other reasons why the ambition to go on the stage occurs. Did I say "may be"? Nay, is, for even among those who confess to being brokers or lawyers or housewives or stenographers, you find that, after the first amenities of introduction are over, they will almost always say, "I am so delighted to meet

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a real actress. You know, I always have had a kind of sneaking ambition to go on the stage myself."

And the reason why they never did is all nicely spread out for you to recognize in the word "sneaking." If it had been any other kind of ambition than a sneaking one, they would have gone on the stage, and try and keep them from it.

Nevertheless, sneaking or not, it is so universal an ambition in this age—now that actors are socially accepted—that whoever goes in and out of that little back door is besieged with letters to please tell them how to go about this getting on the stage.

And if you happen, either by hard work or a funny nose or bull luck or blazing genius, to have become somebody after having gained your right to pick your way through the garbage pails and refuse to the stage entrance, these petitions take on formidable size. If someone has got as far as being a star, why, then he or she must have the right formula for success; therefore imitative magic is the kind to invoke, and soon the night's mail is swelled with petitions for interviews.

A kind of sinking feeling arrives in the pit of the stomach as these letters appear on the dressing table when you come in to make up, for you can, after a few years, distinguish them swiftly from the rest; perhaps by the handwriting, certainly by the fatness of the envelopes, which usually means a detailed description of how every-

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body has said that Emma or William ought really to go on the stage, for they seem to be just full of talent; of course, they've done only little amateur things and they realize there is a great gulf—all well larded with praise of you and how everybody says that Emma is just the image of you—that always helps—and you are really her ideal on the stage; and a self-addressed stamped envelope to insure a reply.

Casting a wary eye at the ominous fatness of the letter, you leave it to the last—in dread, perhaps—and wade through the regular batch of blue, pink and mauve notes which always begin: "I saw your show last night and just loved it. Won't you please send me your autographed picture? I'd just love it." Variants of this sometimes are good for a smile, as the one George Arliss received one night from a young girl who said she "was collecting famous men and women and would so like to add him to her collection." Then the notices of the removal of Doctor Paring's—the eminent chiropodist—office to some place else, letters asking if you wouldn't buy a six-thousand-dollar bracelet if you could get it for three, samples of the excellent work of clipping bureaus who want to know if you knew your name was mentioned in the paper this morning, and all the other waste of good wood pulp to be found in the mail box of anyone whose name has become well enough known to find its way to a mailing list.

But at last there is nothing left but the fat letter, and

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once more you know you have got to give out advice which neither you nor any living soul is qualified to dispense, for here is youth again at the door wanting to know the way to success.

Yes, it is the same tale: "And if you will see her only for a minute." A low suspicion lifts its head that maybe this is just another collector of names, but then maybe it isn't, and it wouldn't be fair; anyway, there's the stamped envelope. Usually it is mamma who has written, for mamma can be excused for spilling over a little about her clever offspring and for saying things which the young aspirant couldn't in all modesty say of herself. I must add that the sex of stage-struck youngsters is mostly female; at least those that have come to me have been, although I suppose the boys go to the male stars. At any rate, there's the situation, and face it you must. The interview must be given, you must hear all about everything, mamma doing the talking, while the young hopeful stands by, confused and yet thrilled to be so near an actress, already planning how she will tell the girls, and at last it is put up to you: What would you advise her to do?

There it is once more, and once more you are supposed to give a sane answer. What would you advise? The awful thing is that—whisper it ever so softly to yourself, for they must not find it out—you don't know.

And that's the real truth—you simply do not know. You know how you got started on a career, but that's no

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signpost for everybody else in this profession. The fact is, there is no royal road to the stage door, there is no beaten path. You don't learn the business from the bottom—that worthy trail traveled by all our American heroes; indeed, you might be the very one to walk from Barnard College into leading parts as Helen Gahagan did. Why then advise beginning in the chorus, or as an extra, to learn the rudiments? We all got there by devious routes, and no two are alike; therefore we cannot say: "Do as I did; that is the only way," for the combination of circumstances may be, and probably is, completely different. Neither can you say: "Lose your Western *r* and learn to speak with the accent of Park Avenue," for that very *r* may make the child's success; nor: "Have a father who is a famous star of an old theatrical family"; nor: "See to it that your mother is a casting agent"; nor: "Get yourself born into the social set, so that managers will give you parts for the advertising your name will bring"; nor: "Fly across the Atlantic"; because none of these methods, though they have succeeded, may be the Open Sesame for the palpitating infant before you, letting you know ever so clearly that her future is in your hands.

Coal barons and oil kings always have a ready formula for the road to fame and affluence, and I suppose in an organized business there is something like a definite procedure; but in the show business—which is no business, but a disease—the thing you tell beginners to do is so

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sure to be wrong and the responsibility is so colossal, is it any wonder those fat letters send the shivers down our backs?

My father used to say, "Be a paper hanger, or a steeple jack, or take in washing—anything but write." Lawyers say, "What in the name of Michael and all the angels do you want to bother with the law for?" Doctors sigh and wonder why anyone ever thinks of medicine as a profession, and actors beg to be informed why any person thinks the stage is an easy life. It seems to me, or at least it used to seem to me, that either they were afraid of new blood and jealous of the young generation, or else they really and genuinely wanted to save their imitators heart-aches and hardships. Now I wonder if it isn't for the reason that the responsibility of someone else's career is too great a load and the best and safest thing to do is to try to dissuade the aspirant and at least have the satisfaction of saying: "Well, I did all I could."

And yet, who are you to stop a career? The Duse of tomorrow may be standing before your eyes. Have you any right to get in her way?

Of course, there's this: If it is tomorrow's Duse she will get on the stage or do whatever it is she wants to do, no matter what you or forty others say to the contrary. You know the old adage: "If you want to hard enough." Well.

Still that doesn't answer the question of what you advise,

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does it? And there it is, put up to you in so many words.

You remember with gratitude a large gentleman by the name of Harrington who had said to you that day going home on the train to Northport: "Arthur Hammerstein is a friend of mine and is going to put on a musical piece right away. If you want to go over and sing for him—" and how you had gone over to the Manhattan Opera House with eight or nine hundred others and the man who heard you sing a scale had said, "All right. Stand over there." Pretty soon another man came and took your name and address, and said he would send you a post card with the first rehearsal date on it right away. Next thing you were learning the words and music with the rest of them and boring all within earshot with what you intended to become in this great world.

Yet the large gentleman didn't actually get you the job; he told you where there was one and you got it yourself.

I shouldn't be surprised if the rosters of the dramatic schools are more indebted to actors and actresses with chills down their backs than they know, for in sending these youngsters who come for advice to such they at least think:

"Well, it can't do them any harm. Of course, you can't really teach anybody to act, but they can learn to use their hands and feet, perhaps their voices, at a school. At any rate, whatever else I might advise may be detrimental

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rather than helpful, and this looks like the safest way out."

This is, undoubtedly, evading the issue. But what are you to do? The thing had begun to worry me after some years of feeling that I had perhaps not done all I could in lending a helping hand, although I had sincerely tried to deal with each problem as it came to me. At least I determined to go to some of my friends in the theater and find, if possible, a formula or some kind of intelligent way to meet the situation.

Accordingly I told Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt my woes one day at luncheon in their most charming house.

"I wish you'd tell me something," I said timidly, for people who play in New York year in and year out, as these two do with the Theater Guild, impress me deeply. "When kids come to ask you how to go on the stage and want your advice, what do you tell them?"

"I wish you'd tell me!" exclaimed Mr. Lunt. "I get so embarrassed I don't know what to do or say."

"I tell them to go to agents," said Miss Fontanne. Aha, there was something definite.

"But do they know what that means?" I asked, thinking for the moment that even this was also just a way out, a getting from under.

"Rather not! They all come back to me and say, 'But I've been going to an agent now for three weeks and nothing has happened.' That to me, who sat in agents' offices for ten years! I suppose it's the influence of the tabloids,

where things always happen overnight. No, action is what they want, and miracles."

"Did you begin by going to agents? I mean, is that why you recommend that procedure?"

"No, not exactly. You see, I was, at the age of three, stood on a chair and made to recite pieces for the family and all callers, and was known seriously as the future Ellen Terry—that was what I was and that was what I was to be. So that, when the time came for me to go about it, I went down to the Drury Lane Theatre, where they always wanted extras for the Christmas pantomime, pushed in with the crowd and was taken on. As you know, it is only in the last few years that managers have given leading rôles and important rôles to beginners. When I started—and that not so long ago—you began as an extra and finished playing Shakespere, so my procedure was orthodox. Well, when the panto was over I inquired around until I found where another show was going on which would need a mob, and went in once more with the rest. This I repeated until they began to know me and give me bits. Then came the years of agents.

"But I can't say to the people who come to me for advice, 'Oh, to be in Drury Lane at pantomime time!' can I? So, I feel, agents are the only way out. They know where the jobs are and it is up to the person to get one."

"What about you?" I asked him who is so fondly known as the First Actor. "Do you feel your way of arriving

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on the boards is any help to someone who wants to get there too?"

"Well," said Lunt, grinning, "you see, I had a drag. I knew a man in Milwaukee who had something to do with the Castle Square Stock Company in Boston, where I found myself, and feeling this yearning to be an actor, I went over to him to see if he had a job. He said I could walk on for five dollars a week if I wanted to, and I wanted to so much that I did so for two solid years. Lived on it too. Oh, I had a lot of friends who would set me up to eats occasionally, so I didn't starve, and I played everything that wasn't under seventy years old; I specialized in old men. Not through choice, you understand."

"But do tell her about Margaret Anglin, darling," said his wife. "That's the most extraordinary thing."

"It hasn't anything to do with what we are talking about, but perhaps it means something. I don't know. You know, one is not supposed ever, in America, to say 'I got where I am because I'm lucky,' but 'because I've worked hard.' Well, I wonder. Anyway the thing about Margaret Anglin was this: I had been playing old men until I was well fed up with them and told my friend if they gave me another old man to play I'd quit. Of course they didn't believe me and passed me out a codger of eighty for the next week's bill, whereupon I handed in my notice. That night in my mail box was a long, important

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yellow envelope. I can see it yet, with the name William Faversham engraved on the upper left-hand corner. I know it was engraved because I ran my thumb over it. The letter inside said that Mr. Faversham had seen my performance at the matinée yesterday—he was playing in Boston at the time—and liked my portrayal very much. Would I call to see his manager the following day about an engagement for next season?

“Would I call? Let me tell you, the pressing and polishing that went on in my wardrobe that night and next morning was nobody’s business! And with my shining morning face I walked briskly down to the theater to meet Mr. Faversham’s manager. On the way I passed a huge twenty-four-sheet poster which announced that Margaret Anglin was playing at the Park Square Theater in *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, but beyond the knowledge that Mr. Faversham and she had once played together, this made no other impression.

“Arriving at the theater offices, I sent in word that I had an appointment—a lovely sensation to one who had been bullied by office boys—and was ushered into the manager’s office. He looked at me, rather puzzled, even after I had introduced myself, but that did not surprise me, for I was accustomed to people not knowing I was that old man who came on in Act II. I explained this with easy grace, but still he looked bewildered. Finally a light broke over his face.

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“‘Oh,’ he said, ‘you’re not the fellow we wanted at all. It was So-and-So.’

“Ordinarily this would have crushed me to the ground, but something hitherto unknown in me—something jaunty—spoke up with great—aplomb, I believe is the word—and I found myself saying, ‘Well, that’s all right, because I couldn’t accept Mr. Faversham’s offer anyway. I am going with Margaret Anglin next season!’ and swung out of the office terribly pleased with myself. The funny part of it is that I really did go with her as her leading man.”

How that happened I didn’t have the nerve to ask, for already I was sounding like an interviewer. Whether it was luck, or something deep and mystic, I shall have to wait and ask another time; although I suspect the fickle jade has Mr. Lunt especially under her care, for a story was told to me the other day about how this same Mr. Lunt was asked to do a stock job some place and to name his salary. He had heard the firm was willing and able to pay, so he wired: “Accept. Salary two hundred dollars a week,” from his home in Wisconsin. Next morning the telegraph operator called him up and said:

“Well, I got you the job. Sure, I got it for you. I knew nobody would pay you two hundred dollars a week, so I changed the wire to one-fifty and here’s the wire back from them saying, ‘Salary satisfactory. Come at once.’”

And who shall say that that wasn’t luck?

But still we were getting no nearer a solution of my

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difficulties—which were theirs, of course, too—and we parted with admonitions to one another that if one of us found a real answer, to waste no time in passing it on to the others.

So next I tried Mary Eaton, that bewitching blond star whose dancing toes occasionally touch the floor just to show she's human like the rest of us. She, I knew, had been on the stage since she was a child and ought to be able to tell me what she said about how to put a foot on the ladder. But I found her in a dilemma too.

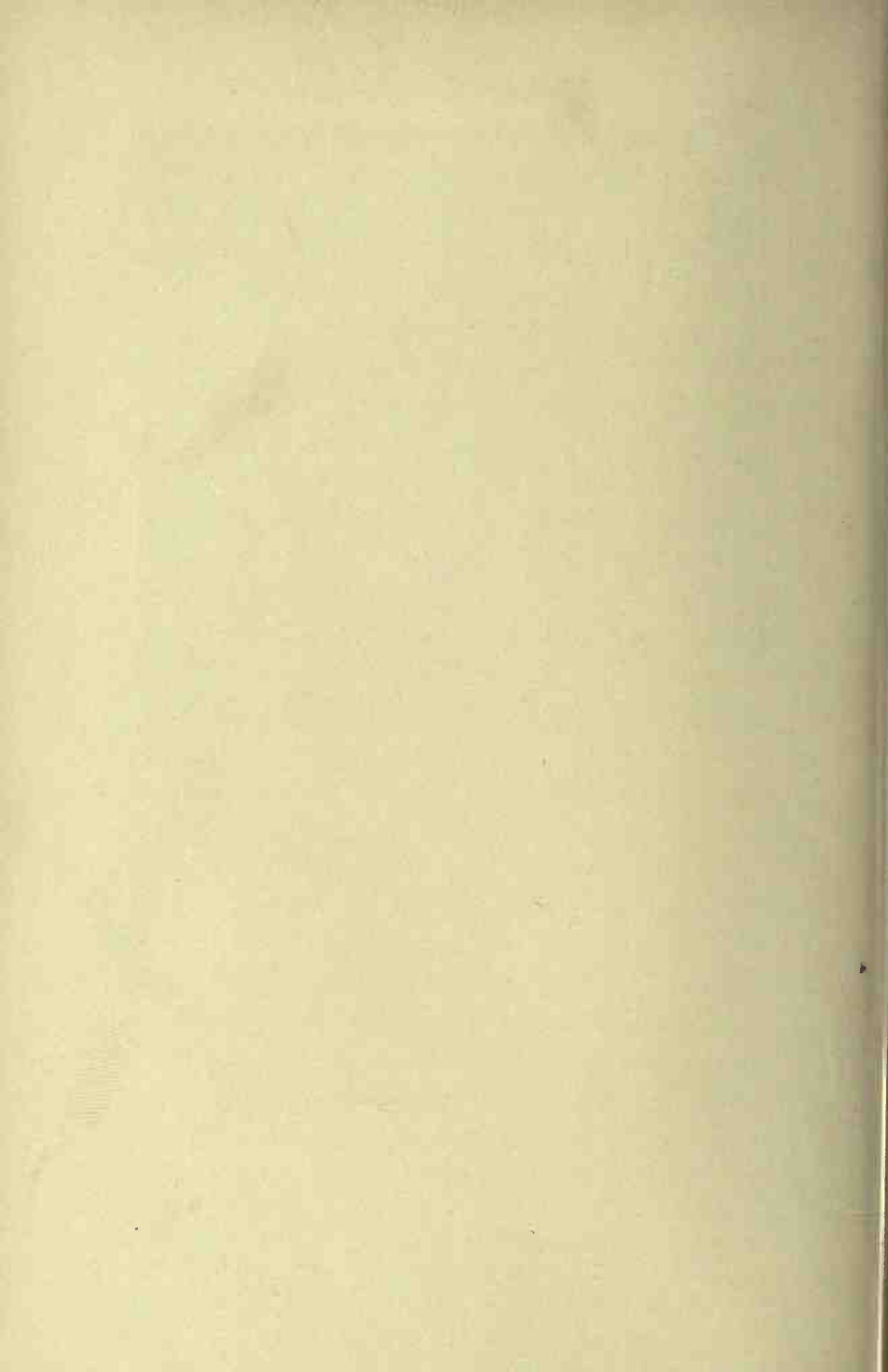
"You see," she said, "if you are a dancer, there are certain things you must learn at a school; but what to do with your equipment after you have learned it, how to make it unique and something that is you, must come from yourself. I can't tell them how to do that. In a way it is easier for a dancer than anyone else to get on the stage, for there are such wonderful schools here in New York now and the managers and dance producers are always going up to those schools to look for new talent. And when a dancer shows the producer a routine he can actually see what that will look like on the stage. But when it comes to applying that ability to a rôle where there may be singing and lines to say, of course, he can't tell. So I can advise them to go to a dancing school, but that doesn't necessarily mean that that is the way to get on the stage. I can't tell them that."

"How did you do it?" I asked.



Culver Service

ROLAND YOUNG AND PEGGY WOOD



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"We lived in Washington—my mother, my sisters, my brother and I—and we were as poor as poor could be. My mother did everything for us, of course. And one day she went into Poli's Theater there, where a resident stock company was playing, and asked at the stage door if they ever had any need for children to play children's parts, for she had some she thought were very cute. They didn't have anything just then, but they took her name and address, and the first thing we knew there was a call for one of us. Well, we got to be a fixture there; whenever there was anything for children to do, they always said, 'Send for one of the Eatons; one of 'em is sure to be right.' This went on for a long time, until finally one day mother said, 'Let's go to New York,' and we went. We've been here ever since and we are all working in the theater."

You see, it's as simple as that. Only you have to have a mother who will go to the stage door of a resident stock company and who will one day say, "Let's go to New York."

Then I tackled Helen Hayes.

"I tell them to go and do stock until they get experience," she said.

"But," I answered, "do you get the stock job for them?"

"Oh, no, I can't do that. I can only tell them where they are to be had." There it was again—you could really only tell them where the jobs were; it was always and forever up to them to land one themselves.

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"But," I again objected, "I always feel they want you to get the job for them. That advice is not what they want at all; it is only a nice way of saying, 'Can't you give my daughter a position in your company? You are the star; you can have anything you want.'"

"You can't do that if you don't know anything about them, can you?" smiled Miss Hayes. "It would be dreadful to send a letter to your manager telling him to give this girl a part; she has wonderful talent, so they say; and have him take her on your say-so, only to have her turn out to be a complete washout, thinking of the stage in terms of the diamond bracelets that are supposed to come wadded up in the center of every bunch of violets. Then when you sent him someone who is really bound for the top rung, he might say, 'Listen, sweetheart; I've had one scald with these protégées of yours. No more.'"

"And yet, if you send them to a stock company and they get the job, how do you know that might not be the worst influence in the world for them?" I asked, realizing that there are precious few where you can get really good direction. The whole aim and purpose of many of them seems merely to get through the Monday performance, make 'em laugh if you have to fall down to do it, and try to give the cues once in a while.

"If they have the stuff they'll come through," she answered.

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"Ah," I exclaimed, smelling a mouse, "that's what you did!"

"Not really, I didn't," laughed the tiny star. "You see, it all happened because I was pigeon-toed."

Visions of a manager looking all over America for a pigeon-toed actress who would give just the touch he needed for a play, and finally exclaiming, "Ah! Helen Hayes!" arose before my startled eyes. I had heard of people going on the stage because they were double-jointed, but I had never heard of pigeon-toedness being the determining factor of histrionic ambition.

"To correct this my mother sent me, at the age of six, to a dancing school," Helen went on. "That didn't seem to help an awful lot; in fact, the defect has never been quite cured; but somehow or other, when it came around to the end of the term and time for what the dancing teacher was pleased to call the May Ball, I was chosen, among the others, to appear as something in it. As a matter of fact, bad as I was, I couldn't have helped being in the thing, because every pupil had to be in it to show what a large dancing class it was. My mother had been to see a Follies shortly before the May Ball was announced and when she realized that her child was to act out in a real theater—for we were to have a real stage, with scenery and everything—she determined that little Helen should be and do something different from the rest. Annabelle Whitford, as the Gibson Bathing Girl, in this particular Follies, had made a

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great hit with my mother and she decided that it wouldn't be a bad idea to teach me the song, dress me up as the Gibson Girl and send me out to do a single, as they say in vaudeville.

"This she did; made the dress herself and rehearsed me until I couldn't possibly make a mistake. The afternoon of the May Ball came around at last and I appeared.

"Now the lady who had the class had borrowed some scenery from Lew Fields, who happened to be playing there that week. How she came to know him or have the courage to ask him for it, I don't know—perhaps we performed at the theater where he was appearing. At any rate, she did get it, and for some occult reason he chose to enter the theater from the lobby just at the moment I tripped on to chirp my little piece. Goodness knows, you'd think a May Ball would be the last thing in the world Lew Fields would ever want to see if he didn't have to, but there he was. When I had finished he went out to the box-office man and said, 'You tell that little girl who just sang if she ever wants to go on the stage to come and see me.' This was duly repeated and put away in our memory box.

"A little later a friend of mother's bought a stock company down there and said to mother one day: 'Helen is sort of used to appearing before people now and we've got a little part in the next week's show; won't you let her do it?' Mother did, and from then on I did all the children's bits.

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I got to liking it and did more and more parts, until one day mother said, 'We are going to New York.'

"Remembering suddenly Mr. Fields' remark of four years before, she dug up a picture of me in the Gibson Bathing Girl rig and called on the gentleman with me in tow.

"Do you remember this little girl?' she asked.

"Perfectly,' he replied. 'And I recall what I said at the time.'

"Well,' said mother, 'we're here.'

"And I've got a job for her,' he said.

"So you see, it really all happened because I was pigeon-toed."

And had a mother who also said, "Let's go to New York."

The extraordinary thing about these two Washington children is that though Mary Eaton started as a dramatic actress in Poli's, she has become one of America's foremost dancers, and Helen Hayes, who began her career singing and dancing, has developed into one of America's foremost dramatic stars, with as uncanny a gift for what is true and right and thrilling in emotional acting as there is anywhere in the world.

So how can you tell? Even mothers, who ought to know best of all, cannot predict or plan.

And then there are those who start out so badly that any one of us with any experience would be glad to go to them quietly and say, "I realize you want to be an actor and all that, but truly, it would be better for all concerned if you

gave it up. You'll never do, and the heartaches of failure and disappointment are so hard." But who knows whether or not we aren't like the Irish hotel maid who said to Ysaye when he was practicing a difficult passage over and over and over before a concert in Wheeling, West Virginia: "Give it up, man dear; ye'll never learn to play the fiddle."

Henry Miller used to tell a story on himself about his first experience on the stage. He had heard that a great Shakesperean star was to play in Toronto—which was Miller's home town—and knowing that there are always mobs in Shakesperean productions, he went down to the theater on Monday and braced the manager for permission to appear. He was lucky, for not only was he accepted but he was given a line to say. This he rehearsed and rehearsed, trying all the inflections possible in the English language and proudly "gave all" at every performance that week. A few years later, by a great coincidence, he was engaged as leading man with this very same male star.

"And not letting well enough alone," Mr. Miller used to say, "I could not resist identifying myself to him. So I asked him if he had played Toronto often. Oh, yes, he had, many times. Did he remember playing there such-and-such a winter? He thought he did. Did he remember playing *The Merchant of Venice* there that week? Very likely. Did he remember a nineteen-year-old boy of Toronto who played a bit—Stephano? At this point he

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suddenly peered at me long and earnestly; then got up and went to his wife's dressing-room door. 'Helen,' he said, 'he's here!'

"I had become a household word," Miller used to chortle. "I must have been awful!"

But he became one of the best actor-managers. If one such as he had come to me for advice, what should I have said? I don't know. He had an impediment in his speech; that alone, you would think, would have been enough to hinder him on his road to fame. But it didn't. Good health and no deformities, you would say offhand, certainly are essentials in an actor's equipment, and yet one famous actress was sick all the time and used to have to leave the stage to take her medicine. This was Clara Morris. John Drew had a bad cast in one eye and always played his scenes profile to the audience, if possible. He never had a photograph full-face until very late in life, when his eyes had been operated on and he was forced to wear very thick spectacles. There is an actor playing in New York now who has a withered hand, yet I defy you to tell me who it is or notice it while he is playing. And a young English actor who was over here a few seasons ago has a wooden leg, his own flesh-and-blood one having been shot off in the war, and yet he conceals it so admirably that you cannot detect his loss.

The war may not have deterred that young gentleman from pursuing his ambition, but queerly enough it gave

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Leslie Howard his opportunity to go on the stage. That blond and handsome actor came back from the Front to find his old job at the bank given to somebody else, in that time-honored way of employers, and he couldn't seem to find another. One day he wandered into a theatrical agency, and because of his looks and general gentlemanly bearing he was swooped into a leading rôle in half an hour and has been playing them ever since, as well as writing articles about the theater and a most amusing play called *Murray Hill*. That the stage is his real calling is unmistakable. Was it luck that caused his bank job to be filled by someone else, or what? Can he advise those who come to him to go to a war, come out well and whole, find no work and wander into a theatrical agency in order to repeat his road to the stage entrance? I ask you. Or can he say, "Begin at the bottom, my boy, learn your business thoroughly, and some day you'll be a star," in the face of his own experience?

Then I bethought me of Dudley Digges, that delightful Irish actor who both acts and directs for the Theater Guild; he would be sure to have had tons of experience with the young idea and would, from the wisdom of years of being a stage manager and more years of being an actor, be able to tell me what to do.

He was fairly busy, what with playing in two Guild shows and rehearsing in another, but finally I caught him at a spaghetti supper one Sunday night.

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"I suppose you have tons of youngsters coming to see you about getting on the stage, don't you?" I asked as an opening.

"No," replied Mr. Digges.

This rather floored me, but I went on: "I should think you'd be besieged by them."

"I am," he replied, "but they scare me to death, so I write to them and say the best thing I know to do is to go ask somebody for a job—a stock manager, an agent or a regular manager. The Guild is very anxious to find clever youngsters; they can go there and apply for a position in any capacity until they prove worthy of a real part. But I myself am no judge, nor can I advise a procedure. You see, I almost got into an awful jam once for trying to get some girls onto the stage. I was stage manager for *Disraeli* at the time, and in the last act we had to have a flock of extras for the big scene when Disraeli made Victoria Empress of India. On tour, of course, we picked them up where we could, and the ones we got weren't always the most beautiful women in the world.

"One day in Montreal Mr. Arliss came to me and said, 'Mrs. Arliss and I have been shopping here and in such-and-such a store we saw the most lovely girls. Why not go to them and see if they don't want to earn a little extra money?'

"So I did go. I found the place and the girls, who were all

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Mr. Arliss had described. I enlarged upon the thrill of stage life to them, and they were all for taking it on. 'But,' said they, 'how much will you pay?' That, of course, was the rub. '\$1.75 a performance,' I answered; whereupon they roared with laughter and told me they were models for the Paris gowns and made from eighty to ninety dollars a week. But they did want to act anyhow, and told me to see the manager of the store for permission, because they would not be allowed to work elsewhere without that.

"With some trepidation I went to his office, introduced myself and told him my story. He listened with growing anger until, no longer able to contain himself, he flung an accusing finger at me and cried: 'Get out of my office! I know what you are; you're nothing but a white slaver.'

"No, I have given up showing people how to get on the stage," said Mr. Digges.

"Could you tell them from your own experience what to do?" I asked.

Mr. Digges' eyes twinkled in true Dublin fashion.

"Well," he said, "hardly."

"But how did you manage it?" I persisted.

"I'll tell ye some day—some day when ye've all day to listen. I'll take ye for a ride in my motor car—this is to let ye know I have a motor car—and maybe I'll tell ye."

"Didn't you start with the Irish Players?" I went on, knowing the day when he'd be free would be never.

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"In a way—in a way. Ye see, I'd no idea of the stage at all, at all. Economically it couldn't be done. But there was a party one night in Dublin—"

"Yes," I prompted.

"Ye'll have it out of me the first thing I know! Well, it was all because of a man named Callahan. Ye see, there was a party at Callahan's house and a man recited."

"And—" I prodded.

"And— It isn't fair to drag it out of me before I ride ye in me motor car! Anyhow, the man recited and I took Callahan down in the cellar and said, 'That man was terrible!' and recited myself a piece about Christmas in the poorhouse. . . . I'll tell ye no more till ye see the motor car. But 'twas all because of a man named Callahan."

Needless to add, Mr. Digges has begun to act in another play for the Guild, and from the looks of things I shall never see the motor car.

Despairing of finding any help or answer to my question, I decided to ask one more person and to go at last to Ina Claire. She would be sure to know what to say to the crowds of youngsters who come to her for the magic phrase which would open the enchanted door to them; for if there is anything about the theater Miss Claire does not know, it isn't worth knowing.

"What do I say to them?" repeated that blond and brilliant lady whose clothes are the next word from Paris. "Me,

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I run! I can't give them jobs, for I don't own the production. Anyway I wouldn't dare trust a part to them until I had seen some of their work, and asking a person to recite for you is a terrible ordeal for the reciter and cannot possibly give you an idea of his or her real qualifications. I do send occasional ones to someone who can teach people the essentials of stage deportment, but I suppose that is evasion on my part. You see, I started to have ambitions to go on the stage when I was no more than three or four years of age; so I am at a loss how to advise old ladies of eighteen. I used to imitate everybody who came near and dressed up in my mother's clothes until she never had a gown to her name that hadn't been pulled and yanked around by me as I acted before the mirror. She must have sensed I was a good mimic, for she encouraged my plans to be an actress and let me go to the Lafayette Theater in Washington"—there must be something about the climate in Washington—"when they needed a child actor for a show. It was a boy they wanted that first time, but I persuaded them I was swell in boy parts. I got the job all right and had a scene all to myself on the church steps with the organ playing. From then on I bedeviled every manager and everybody around until I got parts. I simply would not go to school. I was to be an actress, and the sooner I got at it, the better for all concerned. As a tiny child I got into vaudeville, doing imitations; then I went into the chorus of musical shows. I got an education somehow—my mother probably

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saw to that—but I was bent on being an actress, and heaven help whoever got in my way!

“What can I say, then, to those who come to me at nineteen and twenty, well educated, well fed and faintly burning with a desire to go on the stage? The only way I know is to begin when you are old enough to walk and talk.”

So, you see, we who dwell in the glamorous radiance of a stage career—which, goodness knows, is so much less glamorous than that which is lit by the Klieg lights—simply don't know how to help those who want to come in too. We should like to be able to hold out our hands and say, “This way,” but we don't know how. We understand the thrill that rushes through you when you see backstage for the first time; although, as a little girl friend of mine said, like the boy in the fairy tale who told the truth about the king being naked: “Why, it looks just like an express office!” We know how your heart can jump when the boy calls, “Half hour!” “Fifteen minutes!” “Overture!” and at last: “First Act! Beginners, please!” on that first night of your very first performance. But if the capacity to thrill is there and you want to go on the stage more than anything in the world, don't worry. You'll do it.

You may be like the girl who tried so hard to get Beer-bohm Tree to give her a chance, but he was too busy to see her, so she went to the theater where Tree was rehearsing the production and sat in the stage-door entrance for six

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weeks seeing him come to rehearsal at 10:30 and leaving at four, until he got so used to her face he thought he knew her and spoke kindly every day. At last she told him why she was there and he was so amused by her persistence that he took her inside the theater and had his stage manager find her a position.

You may have to go the dreadful rounds of agencies for months, despairing and unhappy. But it will be up to you at the last to ask for the job yourself. We none of us can do that for you, nor do we know how to advise you to word it. We might even make a break such as Blanche Yurka almost made once when she went after a part she heard of. She had been told by somebody that it was a woman-of-the-world rôle, so she put on her longest earrings, made up her eyes heavily, and carefully managed to be smoking a cigarette when the casting director came out of his office to look over the roomful of applicants. His eyes swept past her without a flicker. Soon she discovered, by asking her neighbor, that the part was that of a sweet pure young thing, whereupon she flew out of that office, grabbed a taxi, dashed home and into a fluffy dress, tore off her earrings, jammed on a big floppy hat, rushed back to the office, greeted the director with a shy smile—and got the job!

Looking this all over, I have come to the conclusion at last that the only way to get on the stage is to be born in Washington, go to Drury Lane, have a friend from Mil-

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waukee, be pigeon-toed, speak with a lisp, go to war, lose
your job, be a mimic, have a mother who says "Let's go to
New York," and know a man named Callahan!

Will you forgive us then if the shivers go down our backs
as we murmur over the fat letters: "Beginners—puh-lease!"

IV

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AND I can guarantee you forty weeks' work." So runs the recurrent dream of the average actor.

And if what the psychologists tell us is true—that the mood of the day is determined by the dreams of the night before—this one should set the actor whistling merrily as he prepares to meet a manager or an agent in his daily search for a job during the hunting season.

"Yes, sir," the manager should continue if he knows his lines, "it's a great play, a great part, and with my hook-up of theaters and bookings you are sure of not less than a forty-week run. Here's your contract; we begin rehearsals to-morrow."

Then off will pop the actor to tell his family they can take a lease on that flat, pay up the money they borrowed to tide over a couple of years when ten weeks was all he got out of each season's work and maybe make a down payment on that lot on Long Island.

M'm, yes, that's the way it ought to happen to follow the dream pattern, but you know what they say about dreams. And from lack of coming true, this dream is fast passing

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into the realms of pure fantasy and soon will be lumped with the falling dream as only a racial memory.

But hope has a habit of springing eternal, you know, and in such a gambling game as the theater there is always the chance that this play will be the one to strike the public fancy. Even if, after the four weeks of free rehearsals the actor is required to give, and the usual out-of-town tryout, the play looks as if it didn't have a chance, even then you never can tell; it might look pretty terrible, but don't forget *Abie's Irish Rose*; it flopped in New York the first two weeks and only through the author's efforts was it kept on until it began to attract the crowds which enabled it to stay on Broadway for five years, let alone the proverbial forty weeks.

Does forty weeks seem like such a lot to ask, such a tremendous long spell of work to you who work fifty-two weeks a year and two weeks off for vacation? Does it seem like the Ultima Thule of all one could wish in the way of prosperity? Well, it is, to an actor, these days.

Once upon a time actors opened in New York, say, with an established star, and knew exactly how long they would play that season. Once upon a time shows without any stars were booked to the Coast and back, and the actors received route cards to give their families and friends so that mail could be sent to them all along the line. Once upon a time shows could play three weeks of one-night stands in the state of Texas alone; now there is one theater

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playing legitimate and musical shows which come from the producing center of New York. And once upon a time there was a beautiful princess with long golden curls—

Yet, though the average season for the average actor has been reduced from about thirty weeks a year twenty years ago, and nearer thirty-four twenty-five years ago, to sixteen, there are compensations. There used to be a gag used by variety artists who carried on conversations with the drummers in the orchestra pit:

DRUMMER: I certainly wisht I was you, makin' all that dough. How much is it a week now?

COMIC: Four hundred simoleons. How much do you make?

DRUMMER: Twenty dollars.

COMIC: Yes, but you get yours.

Those were the days when there was no Actors' Equity Association, when unscrupulous managers would, and sometimes did, decamp with the box-office receipts, leaving a company some place west of Yakima, Washington, to get home as best they could. Those were the days when actors were known to have rehearsed thirteen weeks for a supposedly New York musical show, only to be told at the end of that time that the show wasn't in shape to be produced and that the authors had been instructed to rewrite it for the following season. For their thirteen weeks they got exactly nothing—that is, in the way of cash. Maybe they got a lot of instruction in the art of acting, but that wasn't negotiable at the moment.

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But now the economic side of the acting profession is handled with extraordinary skill by the actors' own association, Equity, which has won for itself an enviable place in the annals of the theater for integrity, for fairness and for justice. Long ago has the old cry of the manager—"Actors will never stick together"—been silenced. Now the managers sit in association with actors in such alliances as the National Board of the Theater, a new group formed to see what can be done to aid the theater in America, and they ask the actor for his ideas on organization. They have learned that the actor is too used to giving up, too used to being near the ragged edge to care for much but his principles, once they are emotionally stirred. The story of Frank Bacon, that beloved author and actor in *Lightnin'*, must have fallen on the ears of the commercially minded with strange cadences back when the actors dared to demand that eight performances a week was a week's work, and that if they played more it was only fair they should be paid for them. Don't forget that until 1919 all the Christmas matinées and other holiday matinées you saw were given free by the actor, no matter what amount of money was taken in at the box office.

Frank Bacon, after years of struggle—lean years too—had made a sensation late in life with his play *Lightnin'*. He opened on Broadway very early in the season, but in spite of the hot weather he and the play were packing them in.

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Well, no sooner had this millennium occurred than the situation between the actors and the managers reached a breach and the one and only actors' strike was called. It would have been terribly easy for Bacon to say, "I've been working for this break all my life. I'm an old man; I may never get another chance. I'd better stick on here playing while the playing is good. They'll understand if I don't cast my lot with them just now."

But what he did say at a meeting of the actors the next day was: "Friends, you all know what the success of *Lightnin'* means to me; most of you have heard me read it to you in the years gone by, and heard me tell how long I've hawked up and down Broadway. Now it looks as if this success would take care of mother and me in our old age. So we talked over this business of striking for what we all know is right for the actors, last night, and I says, 'Mother, where do we stand?' and she says, 'Frank, we've cooked over a gas jet before now, and if we have to we can do it again. We stand where we belong—with our fellow actors.' And I guess that's about the size of it."

Unfortunately such stories are seldom heard by the layman, mainly because he never asks us about the economic side of our affairs. No, he usually contents himself with three questions when addressing an actor: "Does the grease paint hurt your face?" and "What do you do with your time?" and "Don't you get awfully sick of doing the same thing night after night?"

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The answer to the first question is "Yes and no"; the answer to the third is also "Yes and no," but the second seems to give so much trouble to a lot of people, it needs more consideration.

Of course actors are notorious for turning night into day, as the lay person generally calls it, and that fact is enough to arouse suspicion. Any departure from the 8:30 breakfast to 10:30 retiring is, by the very look of it—shall we say, fast? As a woman I once knew said, "A man ought to go to business." The whole world is run more or less on that schedule, and, by the same token, is a mighty inconvenient place for the Thespian, or for that matter, any night worker.

For instance, if an actor likes to live out of the city and manages to get a place within commuting distance from his work—that is, New York; for it is there he hopes to have his forty weeks; in fact, it is the only place in the country he can get forty weeks all in one place. Say, then, he has a place in Jersey or Long Island or Connecticut, can he get a train which is convenient for his commuting hours? He cannot. Either the train leaves at 10:30 p.m., while he is still on the stage, or he has to be delivered with the milk.

If he lives in a flat in New York can he come home at night, the day's work over, and talk or play the piano or amuse himself above a whisper for fear of complaint from the tenants who lead "normal" lives and want their sleep?

He cannot.

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If he leads a quiet life and doesn't disturb the tenants, do they do the same by him in the morning when he wants his sleep? They do not. Ash cans, garbage men and dumb-waiters take on a vocal zeal from the hours of seven to nine A.M., which to the actor is the middle of the night, unequaled any other time in the twenty-four hours. Grocery boys, laundrymen, icemen, tailors, gas-meter readers, telephone fixers and all that ilk gallop through the morning hours tearing sleep from those who work at night, and if you attempt to throw them out you don't get any groceries, ice, laundry, phone service or anything else.

The butcher on Cape Cod, where I was playing one summer, told me the only time to telephone my order so as to be sure to catch him at the shop before he went out on his rounds was 7:30 in the morning!

And if you can tell me where there is a hotel upon whose consciousness you can impress the fact that special-delivery letters which arrive at eight in the morning are not the first toots on Gabriel's horn, nor do night letters necessarily contain the only news since the Chicago Fire and must be got to you by saluting bell-boys no later than ten seconds after they arrive, I will see to it you are remembered in every actor's will. One winter I lived in a tall, excitingly beautiful-on-the-outside hotel in New York and in my simple way tried to explain to the clerks that I did my work at night, therefore required a commensurate amount of sleep in the morning, and would they please not ring my room for

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anything but fire or sudden death until ten in the morning? Oh, yes, they quite understood. Oh, yes, they had seen me on the stage. Yes, they would notify the operators.

Next morning. "Good morning, it is 8:45."

Again explanations.

Following morning at 9 a man's voice: "Is this Joe? Sorry, must be the wrong room."

Apologies from management.

Two mornings later, at 8:30: "There's a special delivery for you, Miss Wood. Shall we send it up?"

And this went on for a month, until I had lost my temper, my religion, and was rapidly going into a decline. Finally I wrote a Prayer for Telephone Operators, had five copies made, and saw to it that one was pasted on the switchboard in front of each girl. That worked fine for two weeks; they thought it was funny.

Then they changed management, cleaned out the whole force, scrubbed the switchboard, and I moved. I just couldn't face it all over again.

All this is why the first luxury an actress feels she can afford is a maid to attend to all these sleep breakers, to let her stuff her ears with cotton to keep out the noise, tie a black stocking over her eyes to keep out the light, and rest till a reasonable hour.

Once awake, the popular belief is that she lies propped up in silk pillows and perfumed negligees opening boxes

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of roses and *billets-doux* until the middle of the afternoon, when she spends a long time dressing.

Maybe so—maybe so. It sounds alluring anyway. But in the lives of those I know, it is a scramble to get the ordinary things, such as a shampoo and a manicure, once a week, which is in reality only four afternoons, counting as completely out those days there are matinées to play.

Far from lazing their time away, I find actors are the most punctual people on earth. They've got to be. They have just so many hours until theater time and there is no getting to work a little late for them. A business man in as responsible a position as an actor with a principal rôle can say, "Oh, well, if I'm not there at ten, they can wait five minutes"; but it might be a little embarrassing for a player to step down to the footlights in the midst of a performance and say: "Would you mind reading your programs for a few minutes or going out for a smoke? Our hero hasn't got here yet. As soon as he comes we'll go on with the play."

No, when a play begins there is no stopping until the curtain rings down—not even for a fifth of a second.

A naval officer who once watched a dress rehearsal of a play said to me afterward, "Why, I had no idea every moment was timed like that; one thing to dovetail into another. It is almost as mathematical as target practice. And quite as carefully rehearsed."

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Now he was far from being a stupid person, yet he hadn't a notion of how rigid are the demands of the time element in the theater. Few people have. To hold a curtain—that is, to be so late in arriving at the theater that the curtain cannot be rung up at its appointed time is pardonable just once, no more. And then only for accident or act of God. “Oho,” you say, “many is the time I have sat out in front and waited for an 8:30 curtain, only to have it finally go up at ten minutes to nine.” Yes, that is true, but that is the management's doing. Very often a house is so slow in coming in that rather than have the audience stumble down the aisles and fall over those already there, the curtain is held until most of the spectators can be seated. Sometimes, on an opening such as the *Scandals* in New York the audience was so busy standing outside the theater watching the celebrities come in that they couldn't be corralled until nearly nine. Sometimes, as in the case of *Candida*, the play is so short they don't dare ring up the curtain until quarter to nine. If they do, the play would be out so early the audience wouldn't have considered it had got its money's worth.

Often I have had it said to me, “Don't go yet. You don't have to be there right on the dot, do you? Won't they wait for you?” Oh, yes, they'll wait—once. And that isn't being arbitrary either. You see, you as a member of an audience resent being kept sitting in your seat staring at the curtain or trying to find out whether it's a man or woman who

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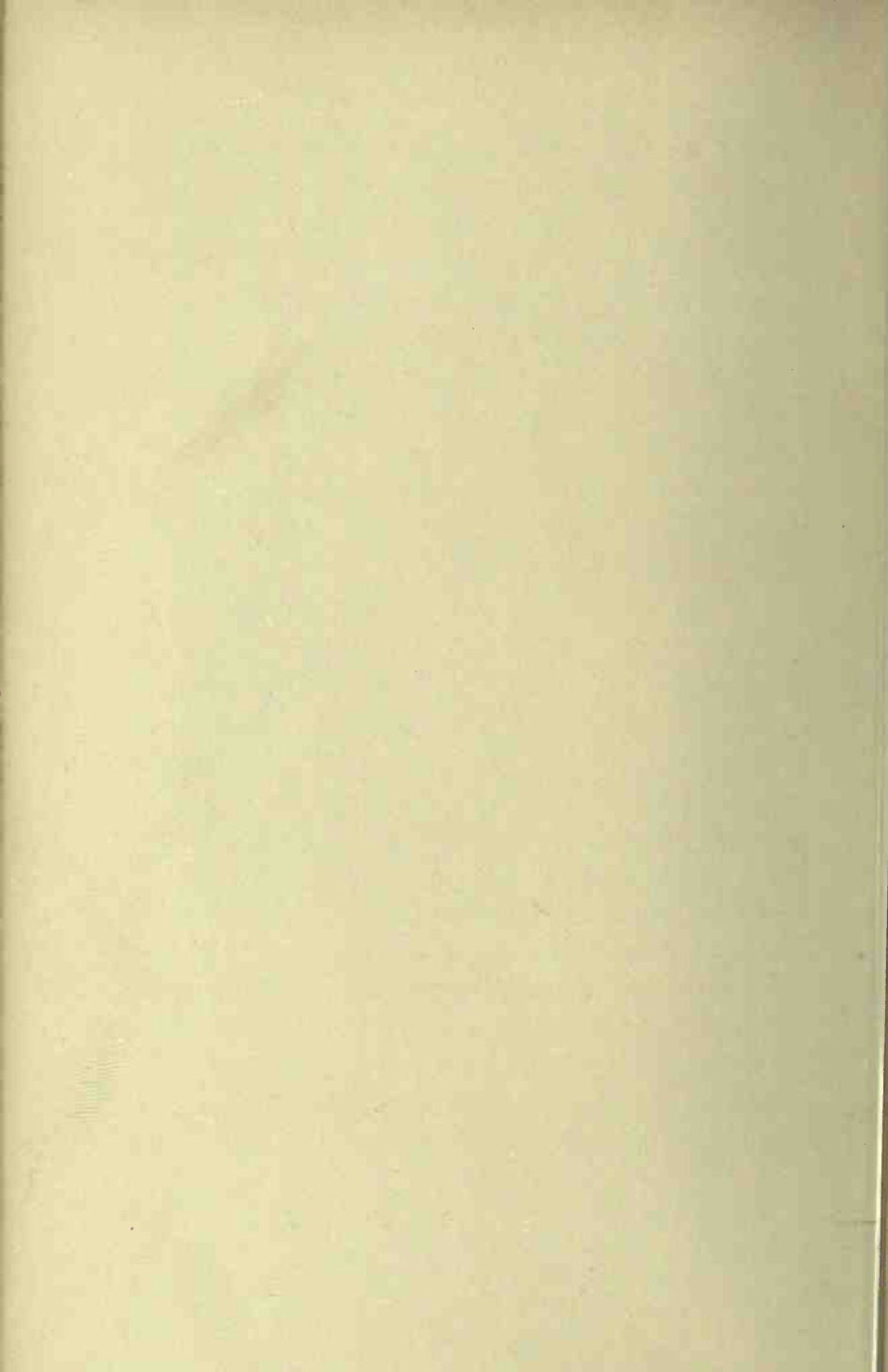
writes the men's fashions in the programs, when you've paid your money to see a play, and if it is the actor's tardiness which makes you resentful, the curtain goes up on a lack of *rapport* between you and him that does nobody any good. You are already bored and fidgety, the actor is flustered by being late and the whole thing goes wrong. Now the actor's job depends on things going right; so though the manager takes it upon himself to do the scolding about being late, it is really the actor who loses most. Anyway he is there to give a performance. The audience is not interested in whether he has a toothache or has lost his girl or cherishes a secret woe; all they want is a show, and they expect the best there is to be had.

To be late for a cue or an entrance is equally unpardonable, except when unintentional or accidental, for it throws the whole play out of joint. The actor on the stage at the time has got to invent lines and business to fill up the hole, and, as actors are not always playwrights, the results can be far from happy. Old-time comedians or such brilliant *farceurs* as William Collier have been known to build a bridge of comedy scenes while waiting for some actor who is late for his entrance cue, but that is an especial gift. Rosita Duncan of the famous Duncan sisters, who have played Topsy and Eva all over the country, has that gift and, like as not, the scene she makes up on the spur of the moment is liable to be so funny that it is kept in the show. But ordinarily such departures from the regular script of the



Photography by Sasha

PEGGY WOOD
IN "BITTER-SWEET"



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drama can be done successfully only in revues or musical shows, or in some scene like the supper scene in *Trelawny of the Wells*. I remember Henrietta Crosman was once late for her entrance during that scene in the all-star revival of the play when it was done last. She was standing in the wings, waiting, but the cue found her apparently in a trance. We all went on chatting until she came to with a start and made her entrance. When she had spoken her lines and arrived at the table to seat herself, John Kellard said, "Well, my dear, you were gone so long I thought you had retired from the stage." Since all the people on the stage were supposed to be actors, the remark fitted perfectly. But "ad libbing" in Shakespere or Shaw or Barrie, or in fact in any play where the lines are so arranged that they must follow in sequence, is absolutely fatal. And it takes up time which should be spent in getting the play along in its story-telling.

To slow down the tempo of a play by loafing through it is just as unprofessional, and has even worse consequences. No stage manager, if he is worth his salt, is going to let himself be dragged up on the carpet to explain to his boss why Act II played four minutes longer last night than ever before. The facts themselves will be down in black and white on the report sheet which goes in to every office every night from every play, and if the audience did not cause those extra four minutes by uproarious and extraordinary laughter and enthusiasm, then the reason is that the actors

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are slowing up, and if it continues after the stage manager has communicated to them the wrath of the manager, there is a sharp call for rehearsal.

To be late for rehearsal is much less common than is imagined. If a star begins to high-hat the rest of the cast by causing them to hang around waiting for him or her to appear, that star finds a pretty angry group of players who let the indignity be known in no uncertain manner. Winthrop Ames, for instance, is never late for rehearsal, and if he can get there the others can. George Arliss has never been known to keep a company waiting.

Indeed, the whole business of being on time is so thoroughly ingrained in the actor that some of his favorite jokes are about dates with laymen. It amuses him no little to think of himself in the popular conception of the temperamental, head-in-the-clouds artist who is supposed never to know what time of day or night it is, waiting for prosaic people to keep appointments. One of the perennial laugh getters is the one about being invited to dine where the hostess always says, "Now, we know you must dine no later than 6:30, so we have impressed everybody they simply have to be on time. They understand you are playing and all that"—and the actor finds himself leaving for work just after the soup.

Miss Carroll McComas tells how she once fell for that inducement, the 6:30 dinner with friends, only to discover at 7:15 that they were still waiting for some of the guests.

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Since the dinner was uptown and the theater where she was playing was in the Forties, she knew just about how much time she could allow herself to get there in time to make up and be ready when the boy called "First Act! Beginners, please!" So with a swift glance at her watch she sneaked around to where she could grab her cloak and make a dash for a taxi without attracting attention. Just as she had maneuvered this, her hostess bore down on her, beaming with the news that she was not to worry about getting to the theater, for the hostess had just telephoned the box office Miss McComas would be a little late!

Having one of those and-then-what-did-you-say minds, I asked what happened.

"Oh," laughed Carroll, "I got to the phone as quickly as possible, told the box-office man not to pay any attention to the message he had just received about me; I'd be there at the usual hour; and would he please send one of the boys out to get me a ham sandwich, so's I wouldn't starve to death before the show was over."

Not long ago an advertising man came to me with a scheme he had planned to put up to a large watch concern. He wanted several authors to write their impressions of some of the things in our daily lives which were concerned with split seconds, such as the Twentieth Century leaving every day at 2:45 on the dot, big liners actually sailing at midnight, and all that sort of thing. My stunt was to have been to go up in an air-mail plane and record how thrilled

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I was that it left as it said it would, passed over Allentown at so many minutes past something, and arrived at ten minutes to something else—all the phenomena of getting to places on time. I didn't do it for two reasons: One, that it is hardly fair to take chances when one is playing. I don't mean fair to oneself altogether; I mean fair to the company and the management, for even in the case of a slight accident, such as being somewhat deafened by the roar of the plane's motors, one's own performance might be disturbed to the extent of upsetting the general running order of the play. The actor is engaged to act and it is his job to see that nothing interferes with it. Once Marjorie Rambeau fell ice skating in Central Park and was forced to stay out of the cast of her play for six weeks while a broken ankle healed. Her manager put another star in her place to keep the thing going until she could return, but he lost thousands of dollars in the transaction. Miss Rambeau was criticized at the time by her fellow actors for taking the chance of even so simple a pastime as skating; and rightly, too, for she was jeopardizing the play, her manager's investment and the salary of the cast working with her. There is a clause in all actors' contracts which states that they may be laid off without pay in the case of the illness of the star or featured player for two weeks, after which, if the star is still sick, the actor must be paid half salary for two more weeks; then, if the illness continues, the manager may disband the company.

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You can see then that dare-devil stunts are not greeted with wild enthusiasm by one's fellow actors.

The second reason I refused to accept the ride was that I didn't exactly want to find myself soaring over Pittsburgh two hours before theater time and no way to get home. Mr. Tunney may like to arrive at his battles in a plane, but that seems to be something wherein Mr. Tunney and I are not alike.

I carefully explained all this to the young advertising gentleman and tried to persuade him that a safer and better story about split seconds lay in the realms of backstage and had the added advantage of being news to the average reader. I offered to take him and the whole watch firm back of the scenes in *The Merchant of Venice* to show him Miss Maude Howell—who is, by the way, the only woman stage manager in the show business—timing the changes of scenes in that production and rehearsing them until they could be brought down to thirty-five seconds each, using a stop watch. That stop watch hung around her neck on a ribbon every night and she held it over the stage hands like Mrs. Legree herself.

But the young man smiled indulgently and said he didn't think there was anything dramatic in shifting scenery.

Yet Winthrop Ames had said, "We can't have any change over thirty-five seconds, remember, if we are to ring down the curtain at a reasonable time, and that is my intention.

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Nobody wants to sit at a Shakespere performance until midnight."

It was done and the papers took columns to tell about how wonderful it was. Do you see anything different in that from a story that Mr. Ford had cut down ten motions in the assembling of his car by such-and-such efficiency method? Or isn't the producing of a fine play, so that it comes out as a fine play, and not burdened with interminable waits, as interesting as a car or a locomotive?

I once heard a manager say to a scene designer: "How long will this scene change take?"

"Exactly ten minutes," replied the artist.

"Is that so?" said the manager slowly. "Then we've got exactly no play. Not an audience in the world will sit ten minutes in the dark during a scene change in the middle of an act—and you've got two changes—without getting restless. Once that happens we're sunk. You know that as well as I do. Now cut out your gim-cracks and give this to me in two minutes."

Well, he didn't. And to help matters, the main character in the play couldn't learn his lines, so he figured out that if he went along slowly, maybe they'd come to him; with the consequence that instead of playing at farce tempo—that is, as fast as possible—he gave a magnificent imitation of Sir Henry Irving in the quieter scenes of *King Lear*.

That was one play that didn't run forty weeks. And the

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play wasn't so bad either; it was the time element that really killed it.

Don't think from all this that speed—that is, fastness—is all that makes plays. Certain scenes and certain plays must be slowed to the last notch very often to get the best effect where often a quick tempo would ruin the whole thing. Harvey O'Higgins, the playwright, used to tell a yarn about the way an actor, in the rehearsals of one of his plays, rattled off his lines so fast that nobody could possibly understand him. None could remonstrate with him, for he was the star, and pretty upstage too. This went on until they all were in despair. Finally Harvey hit on the scheme of rewriting all the star's scenes and cleverly incorporating in them words that could not be said rapidly without turning into tongue twisters of the meanest kind. He gave these scenes to the star, who began to rehearse in his old manner, only to find that he had suddenly said something he didn't intend to, and that the cast and crew were in convulsions. Fiery red, he began again—this time more carefully, more slowly—and from then on they had no more trouble; he was too terrified he'd slip up and make a break some night before an audience.

The word "timing," used so often by actors among themselves, and understood by them as a feeling rather than as a matter of so many ticks of the clock, is something which does not seem to be capable of being taught. George Cohan has a way of saying at rehearsals, "See how long

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you can hold that situation; use an actor's judgment." Whether he means the sense of that particular thing is the only judgment an actor has, I don't know. But I do know that often, if you wait too long after a laugh, the scene has, as they say, "hit the floor," and it takes an awful lot of pumping to get it going again. Sometimes directors tell actors to "Count four, or three, or ten" before they speak again after a certain line in the play, but no two people count four, or three, or ten in the same space of time; so that isn't exactly infallible. No, it is a feeling, a sixth sense which all good actors must have.

But all this business of being time conscious, as you might call it, has an awful effect on the actor's social life, for if the card reads "Tea from four till seven," I for one get there at four. John Drew's daughter, Mrs. Devereux, tells me she had suffered so much embarrassment by arriving at eight, when she was informed dinner was to be at that hour, only to find her hosts still in the process of dressing, that she has had to school herself to break her stage training and plan deliberately to appear at 8:30. It used to be a social error to be late for a dinner party; now it's one if you're on time.

Of course the interesting thing is that so many actors now are being invited to dinner at all. Back in the day of the longer season, when actors were considered a race apart—queer fish who went about dressed in fur-collared coats and long hair—they weren't exactly accepted socially.

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Indeed, one of the landmarks of New York has gained its name and reputation from the usual attitude toward players and their profession—the Little Church Around the Corner. For when Joseph Jefferson tried to arrange for E. M. Holland's funeral at a church in Fifth Avenue, they firmly informed him they didn't bury actors, but that there was a little church around the corner which might oblige him if he asked them. The little church did, which is one of the reasons the Church of the Transfiguration is so dear to the actor's heart, why most of them marry there and are buried from there.

Puritan America has frowned so steadily and so long upon the stage that it is still a surprise to people when they find those who engage in these activities are "really quite nice after all."

Indeed, wise hostesses, even in the cities where actors have some place in the life of the community, are even now careful not to mix their parties, not to ask solid conservative guests when they also ask Thespians; unless, of course, the conservative ones get the feeling they are going slumming. Now an actor, whose business it is to sense the attitude of an audience in a moment, gets the emanation of such a gathering upon entering the room and immediately freezes.

These people usually expect him to sing and dance for them, and the actor feels it coming. Eddie Foy once tagged that kind of party to me, saying, "I know; it's to be

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one of those come-and-bring-your-clogs parties." Actors will turn themselves inside out for you if they feel they are not being treated as strange animals from the zoo, but they deeply resent being made to sing for their supper.

There is a tale of a *nouveau-riche* society woman who was giving a very grand *soirée* and thought she might be able to get as the lion of the evening a great violinist—I think it was Ysaye—and perhaps he'd play for nothing if she asked him as a guest. She wrote a charming note inviting him; to which he replied he would be enchanted to accept. Then she wrote again, wondering if he wouldn't bring his violin; to which he answered that in that case the fee would be a hundred guineas. Rather piqued at this, she wrote once more that she would pay the fee, of course, but would he mind coming in through the servants' entrance?

"Not at all," he said.

The night of the *soirée* came around; the great violinist played; everyone said "How did she ever get him to do it?" and crowded into supper where she promised to introduce him to them all. But when they arrived there no violinist was to be found. Frantically she searched the house for him, and found him dining in the servants' hall.

"Ah, madame," he said sweetly, "you wished to put me in my place, and I am in it."

Nothing could persuade him to leave the servants' dining

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room; he finished his meal with apparent enjoyment and left by the servants' entrance.

But America is fast losing this uncertainty as to just how to treat these artists; perhaps because they don't wear long hair any more; perhaps because it has been generally spread by publicity that they are only human after all; perhaps because the churches have lifted their ban on the theater; and perhaps, because of the influence of the Anglo-philés in imitating the treatment of actors in London, for England is the actors' heaven. There, with their tradition of the theater from before Shakespere's time, with their actor-managers who have been knighted, with their Shaws and Galsworthys and Barries who have contributed, through the theater, to the great literature of the world, they have made idols of their stage favorites. As the legend goes in theaterdom: Once a success in London, always a success. There is none of the American custom of out-of-sight-out-of-mind there. Here it takes three hits in a row to make a star and three flops in a row to kill one; there one hit makes a star, and that star is always remembered, no matter how many flops he or she may have afterward. Here while actors were being denied social rights, there they were invited to the royal garden parties. Salaries were and are smaller over there, but the living was cheaper and the attitude of the people so charming toward actors that they would almost work for nothing. Small wonder then that London is the actors' Mecca.

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Yet, strangely enough, there are at this moment about three thousand English actors in this country. Indeed, up until the past two years the trend has been, like all migrations of people, to the west—that is, to our side of the Atlantic. It was to England that we looked for our plays, for in London were produced the best plays being written; and in order to do these plays well, English actors were imported to play them. And it was smart in the sense of cunning as well as smart in the sense of fashionable, for when one Charles Frohman found he could get British actors for about one-third the salary he had to pay American actors, he naturally was not afflicted with a serious case of patriotism. Besides, the technic of the teacup had not been included in the regular course of play acting for Americans, and these Englishmen who could manage cup and plate without seeming effeminate, wear tweeds without showing they itched, hold a monocle firmly in one eye while dropping syllables all at once made most of our native players look like dressed-up paper hangers, and soon it became the rage to have English leading men. Not only did it send American tailors to advertising English clothes for men and practically ruin the knob-toed shoe industry, but it caused actors to shed their Western *r*'s by the bushel. American actors resented the statement that if you needed a gentleman—that is, someone who could both act and look like a gentleman—better get an Englishman to play the part; and they are still resenting it, for it is still made.

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But it was the fault of the drawing-room drama and the fact that we looked to England for our plays.

Nevertheless, this competition of the English actor, now so firmly established, has been a thorn in the side of our own people which has not exactly worked itself out painlessly.

On the contrary, one might really say it has festered there for a decade, until it had to be lanced by the actors' organization, Equity.

You see, very often whole English companies have been brought here, only to have the manager leave the members to fend for themselves after the play closed; or perhaps if their fares were guaranteed home they preferred to try their luck over here where salaries were higher and chances greater. Season in and season out this has happened until, as I said, there are three thousand English actors in this country today.

And yet, though London is the goal of American actors, there has been no such flood of our people into England. Now, since American plays have become the rage in London, and since no Englishman seems to be able to play such parts as the ex-prize fighter in *Is Zat So?*, or to give the gunman or the bootlegger just the right touch and accent, a great many American actors are realizing their ambitions and are playing in London. Several of our young actresses have made such hits over there it looks as if they would never come home.

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The status, then, is at this time, three hundred American actors in England as against ten times that many English actors here. Now there aren't exactly ten times the opportunities here and the result is—well, unpleasant.

And to make matters worse, the British Labor Party, when in power a few years ago, had a law passed that no actor could come into England looking for work, but must be under contract before he could enter in his professional capacity. This law was put through after the war, when unemployment was in its most tragic stage, and was passed really to protect other activities than acting.

However it was passed, it was enforced, and, although English actors continued to come into America by the score and American actors found even thoroughly American parts were given to the Britishers—one actor told me of losing the rôle of a New England hick to an Englishman—there was no relenting on the part of the Labor Department in England.

This went on until one morning, when the newspapers suddenly broke with a story of the case of a young lady called Alden Gay, who, it seems, was rehearsing in the chorus of an English musical play. She had been found to come into the country without a contract, "for rest and recreation," and after a while had decided to get a job in one of the shows. She got the job all right, but as soon as the Labor Department found out she wasn't "unique and extraordinary" or needed for American at-

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mosphere but was taking an ordinary job out of some English girl's hands, she was fired.

Of course a terrible hullabaloo set up, egged on vigorously by those actors who had been done out of jobs here by Britishers, and the papers were full of it. The Actors' Equity took it up, asked the Labor Department for full particulars, and the hour had come to face what had been rankling for so long a time.

Art should be interchangeable. There should be no frontiers to hinder its enjoyment, but, alas, the theater of today is commercial in the sense that those in it earn their bread and butter by it and are usually dependent completely on it whether they are lucky enough to get their forty weeks or must scrape along on eight. So, unfortunately, the economic side must be considered and the lean years provided for; and one of the ways to provide seems to be to reduce overcrowding and excessive competition.

So the actors got together to see what could be done. They appointed a committee, with George Arliss at the head of it, and set to work. When the rank and file heard that an Englishman was chairman of the committee, especially an Englishman who had made heaps of money here in the United States, there was another hullabaloo, but they soon realized that Mr. Arliss was more likely to lean backward in his wish to compensate for his success here than to ask for favors; and, moreover, it was only fair for

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the English actors to be represented, since they were members of the Equity Association and paid their dues like everybody else. Equity had no intention of allowing the cry of "Taxation without representation" to be raised, with Americans as the culprits.

The upshot of this was that this committee evolved a plan which stated that all alien actors—that is, French, Russian and all nationalities—if they came into the States as a unit—that is, if they came in a company contracted to appear here, should be allowed to enter and play, but that they must go home as a unit when they had finished playing. Or, if they desired to stay, they must wait six months before entering a production under American management. The plan also stated that those alien actors who had been playing here for five years, or who had played a hundred weeks here since 1923, which the committee felt to be the equivalent of five years—you see how the official season has shrunk—were to be considered as resident aliens and had the same status as American actors. Individual aliens must be contracted for and not enter the country as job hunters. This scheme was put before a general meeting at the Hotel Astor in New York and passed by the membership as satisfying their problems.

The president of the actors' association, John Emerson, was abroad for some time undergoing severe treatment for a tenacious throat trouble and was in touch with the English authorities during all this. It is his desire to try to

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persuade the British Labor Department to relax its rigid rules and then have us reciprocate on our side. The economic conditions are hardly the same, and yet in a way perhaps they are. A few years ago, perhaps even now, anything English was smart on this side of the water; for the past two or three years in England anything American has been smart, and the general public is wild about our quaint ways. This has now so extended over the Continent that American cigarettes are sold in the French Government tobacco stores and the last word in chic in the *haut monde* is to give a cocktail party before dinner.

I am sure we all of us hope that Mr. Emerson's wish may become a fact, for restrictions of any kind simply breed animosities.

The first result of the new laws has been to raise the salaries of English actors who are resident aliens, which is what you might call a blow to those actors who have been howling about them anyway. But this is undoubtedly temporary, for managers are not so foolish as they may seem and will not pay exorbitantly for what they can get elsewhere at a reasonable rate. But it does look as if idle Englishmen might pick up a little extra change teaching ambitious American actors how to clip sentences.

And the real solution of it all is that the American stage is becoming the foremost in the world now; Europe looks to us for plays, not we to Europe, as formerly. American plays are becoming the best written, the best acted and the

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best directed anywhere in the world, and I say this with all due regard to Reinhardt and the Moscow Art Theater. American plays require American actors—and there you are. The tide has turned, and in our direction. America has gone into the exporting business now in at least one of the arts.

Of course it would be great to be able to consider the show business as an art, and eventually that is what it will become, as it has in the development of all civilizations in the past. It is suffering now from the bad fit of the business clothes into which it has been forced. In the future we may find that dramatic plays will become like symphonies, to be performed with only the finest of artists and in only the big cities. The "talkies" will supply the popular taste and the theater will not be dependent on business conditions or actors on the chance of a forty-week season.

These forty-weekers do happen nowadays; don't think they are altogether impossible. They occur every year, in fact, but with only two or three shows. Musical comedies don't come in this category, for they are almost always sure of longer runs than the average dramatic offering. What makes for the theme of the actors' recurrent dream is its rarity, but the very hope of its coming true in the face of all the things which exist to make the way of the theater difficult—the movies, the radio and all the rest of it—is that now managers, playwrights and actors are learning

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more and more that if you want a success you have got to give the public the very best there is.

Actors will work for nothing, goodness knows, if they have the means to feed the family and buy shoes for the baby, and if the play is a fine one; they will even gamble with the manager—whose business it is, after all, to do the gambling—in order to give a play every break possible. Sometimes this works out disastrously and sometimes to the advantage of all. Sometimes actors will believe in a play so much they will take it over after the backers have been scared off, and again they will accept a small salary with a percentage to help a management working on a shoe string to give a show a chance to get on its feet. Henry Hull did that in *The Cat and the Canary*, for which the backers were more than grateful until the play turned out to be such a hit that Mr. Hull fairly waded through greenbacks, when their gratitude melted away in the salt tears they shed every week they had to pay him.

One such opportunity is all the actor asks for in his life; that will buy him a home, investments, life insurance, and leave him free to do the plays he wants to do, instead of merely stock jobs or hack work.

It is actors who have had some such success whom you will find in the annual Players Club revivals, given the first week in June in New York. They will play for nothing for the chance to do a great play. I remember J. M. Kerrigan saying, during the week of *Henry IV*,

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Part I, that this was what the theater ought to be—no thought of money, no thought of position, no thought of first dressing rooms, just acting *per se*. And, as Philip Merivale said in his speech at the party given by the Players at their club at the end of the glorious week:

“When I was thirteen our school selected me to do the Player Queen in their production of *Hamlet*; it was so thrilling and such fun that I said to myself, ‘If this is what being in the theater is like I’m going to be an actor.’ But, alas, the theater has never quite been like that in all these years until this past week. I thought I had grown old and hard-boiled, reckoning acting by the Saturday pay envelope, but I find, to my joy, that the thrill is still there and that I’m young all over, like goose flesh.”

And perhaps it is just such experiences which eternally revive in the actor the passion which he has for his profession and makes true the saying that once you are bitten by the theater bug you are never cured. Have you ever seen the inscription cut in stone over the main Post Office building in New York at Eighth Avenue and Thirty-third Street? “Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Well, that gives you something of the idea of how actors feel about their work. Doctors get up at all hours of the night to care for sick folks—it’s their job. Actors catch trains at four in the morning after a night’s performance, dress in damp and dirty

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dressing rooms all over the country, leave their families, their homes, and all their ties, and often go on playing when they ought to be in a hospital—that's their life. They will work for less money if the play should be a production by some fine manager who will enrich the theater with his efforts, and when the chance to do that something fine comes they will achieve an exaltation, a spiritual blessing in the very identification of themselves with the play, which is the essence of the theater itself.

Oh, it has its bitter, heartbreaking side, this business of being an actor; there are so many disappointments, so many times when what we have to give is not appreciated or understood. The critics, steeped though they may profess to be in the devices and technic of the theater, seldom disassociate the part from the player and often roast an actor to a turn when the whole trouble is he has a poor part. And if it is a fine part, they often exclaim, "Where has this person been hiding?" when they may have dismissed that very actor the season before by the word "adequate," or by failing to note him at all.

But it's all part of the game, all part of what you take on when you decide to be an actor. It all goes to make up the gamble of life; and its rewards, when they come, either in the shape of forty weeks' work or the thrill of doing a fine play, or both, are worth treble the rewards of any humdrum, nine-to-five existence. And if we go along in a streak of bad luck, or plod slowly through small parts

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and stock jobs, seeing others flash by us by some lucky break, there is, after all, the satisfaction of being part of the theater to sustain us in doing the thing we want most in the world to do, which gives us the courage to defy the adage that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and to say bravely, with the Jews, that phrase which carried them through centuries of exile: "Next year in Jerusalem."

V

"LADIES AND TICKET BUYERS—"

OH, my dear, I'm so sorry you saw the show tonight!" wails the star. "The audience was so unresponsive I couldn't get going at all. Simply couldn't do a thing. Didn't you notice how cold they were?"

And the friend who has come back after the play, if he or she happens not to be of the theater, says, "I didn't notice." Or else the star exclaims, "Oh, my dear, I'm so glad you saw the play tonight. The audience was simply too marvelous. I have never felt such close contact with them. Did you hear them laugh? And did you ever hear such silence during my big speech? Not a cough in the carload. I never played better in my life."

And the friend says, "I didn't notice."

Why should he, after all? His attention is supposed to be on the stage, not on the people around him. Unless, of course, those people intrude upon him. But the actor on the stage senses, the moment he comes on the scene, just what is the personality of that group of people in front of him. They may look like white blobs in the darkened house, just as the audience the night before looked like white blobs, but they are as different as people

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are different. Before the actor says a word he feels what they are like. That sounds far-fetched, doesn't it? But it is true, nevertheless. And he knows, if they laugh at a certain line, they are going to be quick and appreciative; if they don't laugh at that line, he is going to have a tough time interesting them that night.

What makes this sort of single personality grow out of, say, a thousand different personalities, I don't know. Nobody knows. But there it is every night. You would think that a thousand human beings sitting in the same chairs, listening to the same lines, seeing the same actors, reading the same programs between the acts, hearing the same music, would react in the same way at the same places every night. You'd think so, but they don't. It is as if any audience was a giant, and a different giant came to see the play every night. Sometimes the giant is merry and laughs at everything; sometimes it is sullen and glares at the stage, daring anybody or anything to amuse it; sometimes it is bewildered and doesn't know the etiquette of the proper place to demonstrate what it feels; sometimes it has bronchitis; sometimes it is a stupid giant who doesn't know what it is all about; and sometimes it is a wise giant who says, "I know exactly who the culprit is in this opera; you can't fool me." Sometimes it applauds and won't laugh, or laughs and won't applaud, or both or neither.

I think it derives its personality from one strong-willed

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person or group of persons in the crowd. Is it too fantastic to imagine that these persons dominate without the use of words to sway their fellow auditors? I know that if someone with an infectious laugh is in the audience, or one who owns a horny pair of palms which, when beaten together, make a mighty noise, he can leaven the whole lump, no matter how doughy they have been in the beginning. I remember seeing William Collier lean over the footlights one *matinée* and say to a man whose delightful laugh had brightened up a particularly sodden bunch, “Come in to-night, will you? I can use you in my business.” Conversely, why shouldn’t a thoroughly sour face and disposition have as definite effect? I grant that the laugh is vocal and as infectious as a yawn, but isn’t the lack of even a titter at a funny situation as strong a comment as falling out of a chair? You recall George Bernard Shaw’s famous line when the young dramatist read him a play and chided him after the first act for sleeping through most of it.

“My dear lad,” said Shaw, “you asked me for a comment on your play. Sleep is a comment.”

We all have theories as to why audiences act the way they do, and any one is as good as the next. One manager I know, says, “Watch your hydrometer. Not the thermometer but the hydrometer. If the humidity is high your audience will not respond. If it is low—success.” Maybe so, I’ll try that out sometime. Or you can.

But with all their differences, audiences do come under

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some classification, just as people do. If they didn't and an actor had to face something totally different every single night, he would go just as crazy as if he had to face the same one each night. Variation in moderation is what keeps him sane and keeps his performance from becoming wooden.

It isn't so much that one audience will be all blonds and another all brunets or one all the Four Thousand and another the Submerged Tenth; it is a sort of *mélange* with a sweet, or *frappé*, or hot, or prickly, or flat taste predominating. The stars in their courses seem to have something to do with it, too, for one thing is certain: The days of the week have their kinds of audiences as regularly as the weekly bill of fare runs the gamut from beef to hash, and what are the days of the week but the stars in their courses? "If Venus is in aspic," as May Vokes used to say, who knows but that the love scenes go better? As a matter of fact, Valeska Suratt never took a vaudeville booking unless the planets were auspicious. I hear James Gleason opened a show of his on a Wednesday because that was the one day when all the stars of all concerned were doing their prettiest. So there may be more than meets the eye in actors saying to one another backstage, "Well, Monday and sitting on their hands," or "Friday and marvelous"; although I confess it seems odd that all Mondays should be so much alike; perhaps the stars sing dissonances only on Mondays.

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Whatever it is, a rainy night and no place to put their rubbers, or beautiful weather, the temperature of the theater, or the news that the cook says she's quitting, or a terrible play which helps to pigeonhole audiences into the slots marked Cold, Warm, Rotten, Swell, Weepy, from the actor's point of view—whatever it is, I say, there it is. And you, Mr. Giant, never notice. The actor's point of view may not be important, but doesn't it interest you to know you do things you didn't know you did? Some folks pay expensive psychoanalysts for that privilege.

There are other fascinating things you do, which, if they were concerned with how much milk per capita is consumed in America or some such data, you would know, as a matter of Sunday magazine news, all about. But did you know that it takes you fourteen minutes to seat yourself in a theater when you go to see a play, which you do every night there is a theater open? I am speaking of theaters where only plays and musical comedies perform, not movie houses or continuous vaudeville. Yes, sir, with the exception of a few stragglers and early birds, the majority of you time it so as to arrive seven minutes before the curtain rises and seven minutes after it has gone up. And this, no matter from what distance you may have come—around the corner, Harlem or Canarsie.

And another thing: Did you know that if the decorators of a theater should make the mistake of placing a mirror anywhere near the main entrance of the lobby, you wouldn't

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get seated for at least ten minutes longer than the regular fourteen minutes? Maybe you can guess what the fire chief would have to say about the beehive which would buzz about that mirror when the play was over. Of course this rule doesn't hold at all on first nights, because usually everybody there knows everybody else and stops for a *Kaffee Klatch* on the sidewalk or in the lobby before going to their seats, and it is hours before the girl with the elegant new dress just over from Paris can be persuaded to be seated, for the longer she waits the more people will see her go down the aisle.

The candy and cigar stores, by the way, do very well on first nights—that is, those near the theater where the première is being presented. I hear, too, that as the play runs on and on, fewer and fewer people come out between the acts to buy candy or cigarettes at the near-by shops. And "Death to Hits!" is now their motto. "The more first nights, the more in the cash register!"

And if you should have been so observant as to notice all these things, will you tell me what is your explanation of the most mysterious thing of all that audiences do? By that I mean that when a hit is playing at a theater—a hit so big that it will take a year to accommodate the crowds who want to see the play—why is it that no more than a hundred people a night are turned away from the box office? Why don't they all come at once, several thousand of them? What is it that makes just that small

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number over the capacity of the house—no matter whether it is a small house or a large one—try to see that play that night? What grapevine telegraph informs the thousands that plan to see the play that one hundred have been told there were no more seats, better wait for another night? I believe that so many as two hundred were turned away on one amazing Saturday at one show, but that is the absolute limit, and extraordinary to boot.

We of backstage have no theories about that; we only hold forth about audiences after they get into the theater and begin to listen to the play; but the psychology of the theatergoing public is none the less fascinating from the box-office point of view, from what they tell us. Indeed, to the manager it is what he lies awake nights trying to figure out.

Should he advertise in great splurges; or would the public think he had to advertise because the show wasn't drawing as well as it might? Should he put up the price of the tickets or should he reduce them and make a play for those who had quit going to the theater because it was too expensive? Should he sell to the speculators or advertise good seats at the box office?

The answer to the last might be found in the experience of a manager of my acquaintance who was sitting, one night, in the box office of his theater, listening to the heavenly cadences of his treasurer as he repeated to each inquiring head that presented itself at the wicket, “No,

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nothing left for tonight. Completely sold out. Nothing at all till a week from next Tuesday. Not a thing. Sorry," when suddenly the phone rang and someone who had had two in the fifth row on the aisle had to go to Buffalo then and there and turned his seats in for the treasurer to sell.

"Let me take the line," said the manager. "I'd like to give those seats to somebody I feel would really appreciate them."

He repeated the formula for several heads until at last a young man, whose girl was hanging on his arm, appeared at the opening. They seemed just engaged.

"I certainly can give you two seats," beamed the manager. "Here you are; two in the fifth row on the aisle."

"Fifth row on the aisle at eight-twenty-five? Can't be much of a hit. Come on, Sally, let's get out of here." And they did.

That seems to be pretty generally the way the minds of the average ticket buyers work. George White announces that he will charge fifty dollars a seat for his opening night, and those who have fifty dollars say to themselves, "This must be good if it costs all that money." Besides, underneath there is that still, small voice whispering that everybody there will know the other fellow paid fifty dollars for his seat, and mere presence at that opening will be good advertising. A good deal of the psychology of such an overcoming of the buying resistance can be explained

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in Kropotkin's phrase, "the honorific nature of conspicuous waste." In other words, if you have more than enough to live on, you give your wife diamonds or fur coats or buy the most expensive seats at the theater, in order to show people you have money to waste if you like. His phrase is just a highfaluting way of saying that it is human nature to show off before the neighbors, and that that showing off is an honorable method of procedure in society.

It seems too bad that so simple an emotion should mold so many of our ways of thinking. But there are a lot of extremely astute gentlemen in the show business and they don't forget this elementary fact in marketing their wares. One manager, perhaps more astute than all the others in most ways, forgot that axiom once to the tune of many thousands of dollars. That was Col. Henry W. Savage. Being a highly civilized person, he convinced himself that there were a great number of other folk just as civilized who were not to be fooled about this high-price bunk, and who, moreover, had been writing to the papers about how they could no longer go to the theater because the prices were prohibitive. "I will advertise to those persons," said he; "I will tell them that they can have seats at a reasonable price at my theater and they won't have to go to any speculators, either, for I will refuse the speculators' buy, and sell all the seats at the box office."

This seemed, on the face of it, like good showmanship.

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And it would have been in the early days of the colonel's career, but alas, times had changed and from all sides we—I can say “we,” for it was a play called *The Clinging Vine*, which I did under his management, that he chose for experimentation—heard the question: “What’s the matter with that show? Did they reduce prices because nobody would come?” As a matter of fact, the public did come because they found out it was amusing, but they were the same public who paid \$5.50 the night before for the Follies, and would have paid \$5.50 for us. But those who wrote to the papers went on writing; Colonel Savage never got them back as a theatergoing public. The experiment cost us all rather too much money to let us ever doubt Mr. Barnum’s famous line.

A man who understood this particular quirk of herd psychology engaged a famous Spanish music-hall singer to come over for a few performances in New York. He announced that the seats for the opening night would be twenty-five dollars each, later they would be ten dollars each. What was the result? Did the wise ones in New York wait to get the same thing for ten dollars? Not at all. They fought like mad to get in at twenty-five dollars per!

With the aid of Otto Kahn and a subscription campaign, Eva Le Gallienne has made a success of her theater at \$1.50 top, because she also appeals to the foreign element of downtown who are accustomed to reasonably priced

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presentations of their classics. Then, as soon as the “people who matter” began to find their way to Fourteenth Street, the rest of the herd followed. But they never would have gone simply because the seats were cheaper than uptown; that would have lost them prestige—the prestige that comes from the honorific nature of conspicuous waste.

Of course the whole premise can be completely disproved, just as when Roi Cooper Megrue undertook to discuss whether it paid to advertise or not, in his play *It Pays to Advertise*, where he had one character maintain that one naturally bought a certain kind of garter because we were all so used to seeing the picture of the man’s leg, while another contended that if a product is really fine it doesn’t need to be advertised at all, and cited the Montgomery and Stone show then playing, which didn’t have a single billboard out and used but four lines in the daily papers, simply to show the theater and what time the curtain went up. So the notion that a thing must be expensive to attract the theatergoing public can be exploded by one triumphant gesture in the direction of the cut-rates and Joe Leblang.

There is a student of American psychology, if you like. He saw that in every theater where there was not a sell-out hit—and sell-outs are rare—there were certain seats—say on the sides and back—that didn’t sell at all. Therefore, they were a dead loss. So he went to the managers with this idea: Why not sell those seats at a reduced price

to him and he would let the public know that they could get them at less than the box-office prices by coming to him, and he would charge enough to make a small profit? The theaters then would not lose caste by cheapening their seats, and would fill the empty spaces. The public would be pleased with getting a bargain and the managers, being no fools, saw that half a loaf was better than no bread any time. So they agreed to various arrangements: Sometimes Mr. Leblang only got those seats the first part of the week, when houses were liable to be slim, sometimes he only got the balcony and gallery, and sometimes he got the whole house.

The idea caught on; he built up a mailing list and soon the back part of Gray's Drug Store, where these cut-rate tickets could be bought, began to take on the aspect of a fire sale in a department-store basement every night about eight o'clock. The drug store thought it was fine for a while, but they discovered at last that not one of the seething mob bought a single drug, let alone all the other things drug stores carry these days, nor could regular customers get near a counter. Whereupon it is said they informed Mr. Leblang, in no uncertain terms, that he was in restraint of trade or some such thing and that he could take his dishes out of there any time now, the sooner the better. To which Leblang is rumored to have replied by buying the whole blamed building with the profits of his nuisance, and told the drug store they could go find them-

selves another corner if they didn't like their new landlord. However, he soon found that the back of the store would not hold the scrambling mobs of bargain hunters, so he opened up the basement, made entrances from the Subway, installed a blackboard such as you see in uptown stockbrokers' offices, hired a corps of young men to chalk up the shows as the seats came in or were exhausted, and generally act like brokers on the floor of the Exchange, yelling out, "Two for *The Cyclone*—\$1.85 each!" or whatever, changing the prices as the time got nearer the curtain hour, or according to the demand; and settled back to become a dominating figure in the theatrical world.

You see, then, that whichever side of the question of price you take you can be absolutely right or absolutely wrong. Cut-rates or premiums, it makes an equally good argument either way. The Leblangers will tell you about *The Squall*, which didn't catch on at all at first, went into cut-rates and became so popular it grew out of them to a sell-out at box-office prices for a year. The bargain hunters had got the crowds to going, the grapevine began to work, and once that starts, that is all there is to it. On the other hand, the bulls of the theatrical market will point to all the extra-high-priced shows and show you every seat filled, no matter what they cost. So you see everybody's right.

All these things, which happen before an audience gets to its seats, have their effect on the kind of audience they

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become. Sometimes they, or the dominating groups among them, are sore for having to pay so much hard cash for an evening's entertainment, and they become commensurately difficult to entertain. Sometimes those who have tons of money to spend and want all those around them to know that they go to all the best shows and know good stuff when they see it, become so arrogant in their criticism, not to say noisy, that it permeates the whole audience and the actor finds he has got to work twice as hard to get any response at all.

I remember one such bunch, however, who didn't get very far in their dirty work. It was at the second night of *Show Boat*, a play which has since delighted thousands, so it must have been fairly good. Five richly dressed people came in toward the end of the first act and fell over me without so much as an apology, took two looks at the performance, of which they hadn't a notion of the plot or meaning, and began to knock it. They talked about how rotten it was, from the moment they were seated; they snorted at the music, they squirmed in agony at its "amateurishness," and declared, so that none of us could possibly mistake it, that they never saw such a show; why, it couldn't compare with What-Not or Something-or-Other.

I haven't an idea that they knew or cared whether the show they were witnessing was better or worse than the others; all they really wanted was for us to know how

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familiar they were with the current hits. At first we were terribly annoyed with their loud remarks, but it didn't take long to gather what was behind it all, and at last we not only redoubled our enthusiasm for the play to spite them but began a kidding campaign that literally drove them from the scene of battle. They said the play was so awful they couldn't sit through it, but we all took it as a compliment to our efforts that they rose to go about the middle of the second act.

It just happened that those unpleasant people were in a group who differed with them and knew what they liked; but it might happen that such a group would find themselves among those who weren't so sure of their own taste and more undecided as to what they should do, and who would be influenced by those who seemed so obviously to be in the know. If this group is large enough, you can readily see how a whole audience can be affected; which is why I say that audiences differ according to the amount of yeast or dough in them.

Then, too, you must know lots of those dear souls who let you imagine how sensitive they are to great art by saying to you, "Oh, when I really like a thing I never applaud." If you do, I wish you'd do a little missionary work for actors among them. Just you tell them that this is a world of give-and-take—that is, there is a legend to that effect—anyway, will you ask them to please keep that in mind when the actor gives of his ability? There

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is a something between an actor and his audience which is not quite paid for by the price of a ticket, and though I'll admit that there are rare times when absolute silence is the greatest tribute to the author and the player interpreting his lines, there are other times when, if the pleasure felt in the audience is expressed, it makes the actor grateful and happy in his heart. And if that pleasure is unexpressed, how is he to know you like him?

Tell these sensitive souls that they appreciate being told when they are good or do something well, that actors are only people after all, that the spitting of hands together is the recognized symbol of approbation from audiences, that the actor will not be able to hear them as they go out saying they liked the play or him; and most of all, tell them that if the actor feels he has done well and gets no reaction to his efforts, that very lack of return acts as a check to what he might be able to give. It's like what Frank Tinney used to say when a wisecrack of his failed to arouse any amusement. "Well, I put it over—and it lay there." And an evening of having one's boomerangs fail to come back leaves one—well, out of boomerangs.

Mrs. Fiske said, some place in a book of interviews, that it is fatal for any actor to depend too much on what successive audiences tell him—that is, if he leans too much on their judgment for interpretation, he will be as a cork on a wave. He must have a thorough and definite idea of what he plans to do, not let the people in front tell him

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everything. You see what it is she means; the comedian, for instance, must know what the play is about and not allow the fact that the audience thinks he is a scream to ruin the play by mugging where he shouldn't, nor should the other characters overplay a melodramatic scene simply because those in front like blood and thunder. For the melodrama might fall flat the next night and the shouting actors will find themselves all out of proportion in the play. By the same token the comic will have nothing in the way of characterization to fall back on if they don't think him funny.

They say if an actor stays too long in stock he is ruined for Broadway; which means he has got into bad habits by overplaying before audiences who are used to only the obvious, since the obvious is all the actor working ten performances a week while rehearsing another play can have time to devise for his interpretation. That the obvious always gets over is axiomatic, but it gives a false idea of values, so that too long dealing with it destroys the actor's sense of fine values, makes him say, "I should worry. They think it's good," and makes him unable to deal with a demand for the subtle.

You begin to see, through all this, how terribly important you are. You make or break us. Indeed, without you we do not exist. For plays can be given without theaters, without scenery, without stage hands, without music or carpenters or electricians or managers or press

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agents or box offices, but they cannot be given without the three A's—authors, actors and audiences.

There is a mysterious sort of wireless-telephone connection through the exchange called telepathy, perhaps, which goes into operation immediately a smash appears in town, and the box-office men will tell you "they are laughing when they buy their seats," so quickly does the rumor of what a show is like travel. It's a sort of thing in the air, you might say, which works both ways. Afterward it becomes word-of-mouth advertising. You can readily understand, then, how important the title of a play is as a first attraction toward getting the public's interest; it must be like a slogan—easy to remember, not too long and not hard to pronounce. The name of the star, if any, likewise must be either as simple as possible or so bizarre there's no forgetting it. Hence the reason for stage names and the popularity of numerologists who search the realms of numbers to find what combinations of letters to string together for a name to spell success. For instance, "Gladys Smith," though simple and easily read by the least literary in the domain, wouldn't set up the right numerical vibration, but oh, "Mary Pickford" will jingle merrily in the ears of the treasurers! "Lucille Le Sueur" is too strange to pronounce, but "Joan Crawford" sounds like a name you wish you had. "Nazimova," however, is so exotic as to be unforgettable.

Vibrations? I have seen shopgirls take down the name

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of Mrs. Russell Colt on their purchase slips without a quiver, only to be pop-eyed when they discovered it was Ethel Barrymore. What's in a name, indeed? Everything. As those two drunks might have said who found themselves at *The Merchant of Venice*, thinking it was *Abie's Irish Rose*. They had told the ticket broker they wanted to see that play about the Jew and the Christian girl. That's what they did see, isn't it?

When all these outside influences on the behavior of audiences are catalogued, there is one item which should have a full page to itself: The influence of the days of the week. I touched on that before, but it really needs more than a touch, for nothing is more fascinating than to watch the public change its personality regularly according to schedule, with, of course, departures from the regular run occasionally to make it more difficult. We all know what Blue Mondays are—so well that they are taken almost for granted. Well, they are a weekly occurrence in the theater, just as in the stock market and in school. Why? Perhaps it is getting over Sunday; nobody bubbles much at the end of a vacation. Perhaps it is, too, because Monday is society night. Take a look at the opera on a Monday subscription night and you will get what I mean—too dressed up to care. Besides, being able to stay up late on a Monday means leisure, not having to get to the office on time or be fired, and leisure means time to see all the shows, and that means being blasé about most of them,

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and that means lack of enthusiasm. And the moral of that is, as the Duchess says in *Alice in Wonderland*, "Blue Monday."

My father asked me once what the days of the week looked like to me. I found I had a mental picture of them stringing along down a hill; the first part of the week a little grayish in tone, but the days brighter as they reached the end of the week, which seemed to be in a sort of pleasant valley ending in Sunday, whence they somehow got up to start down another hill. And that is the way they arrange themselves in my mind to this day, even with regard to the theater. Monday is certainly on a little hill, but once having got there, it is easy to slide down the rest of the week. So Tuesday in the make-believe world is a bit easier—easier for the actor to play because he gets more response, and easier for the audience. The week has got under way. If the show is not a complete sell-out, it will be noticed that Tuesday is usually better as to box-office receipts than Monday, unless, of course, you have a first-rate flop, when all signs except bad ones fail.

Down the hill toward the pleasant valley ending in Sunday we come next to Wednesday, and here something new appears: The giant becomes distinctly feminine, and if the play is suitable, she may bring with her a junior giant. When that happens to any great extent, all bets are off, for what an audience of children will do is absolutely unpredictable. I have seen Fred Stone forget the

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plot of the piece entirely and turn himself inside out to amuse the children at a matinée. They tell me that, during the matinée of *Snow-White*, years ago, when Marguerite Clark played the fairy tale at the Little Theater, little girls would get up and walk down the aisle to lean over the footlights so as not to miss any of the story. When she would eat the poisoned apple they would cry out in consternation and beg her not to, just as the little tad in front of me at the Empire Theater shouted to Maude Adams the last time she played *Peter Pan*, as she looked for Tinker Bell, who was seemingly lost: “Inna drower, Peter! Inna drower!” And at the matinées of the magician at the Booth Theater one Christmas, what group of grown-ups could have achieved the magnificent abandon with which the whole audience responded to the invitation for volunteers to go up on the stage? One little girl that day discovered her small neighbor had stolen her piece of candy which the magician’s helper had distributed down the aisle, and instead of pretending she didn’t care, like a grown-up, she simply socked the little neighbor in the eye. Oh, to be a child again!

Speaking of childlike simplicity or naïveté, I once had the appalling experience of playing before an adult audience which had those qualities highly developed. It was in Brooklyn, and the employees’ welfare association of a huge factory had bought out the house, as those organi-

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zations sometimes do. We knew they had done so, and certainly from past experience of such affairs we had no idea that this particular crowd was any different from the usual run. We soon found out. I don't know where they got the notion that actors—live ones—were like the figures on the screen, but they had it; at least they gave every indication that they thought we couldn't hear, for they ran up and down the aisles throwing candy, spying friends here, and there, and yelling, "Yoo-hoo! Sadie! Who yuh with?" until it was simply hopeless to try to play, and the only thing left was to get through as fast as possible.

I was telling of this experience sometime later and had it matched by Ralph Morgan, who said his bunch went one better; they began to throw pennies on the stage. Now to throw pennies at actors is the old-time variety equivalent of calling for the hook, but this crowd was not displeased; they just thought it would be fun. Mr. Morgan finally had to step out of his part, go down to the footlights and ask those in the audience please to refrain from throwing things; they might hit and injure some of the ladies of the cast. They took it good-naturedly and quit without any further demonstration.

American audiences don't go in for that sort of thing much, nor do they boo. A little healthy hissing wouldn't be a bad idea to revive, but perhaps the convention of good manners is better after all. When Americans don't like a play they simply stay away or leave before it is over.

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When European audiences don't like a play they say so then and there, with gestures. They hiss, they boo and they throw things. George Jean Nathan says he thinks that sort of demonstration is a healthy sign; it shows that the spectators are part of the show, which is as it should be, and that the exclusion of those spectators, as has been the custom on this side of the water for the past few years, is stultifying. Happily, recent plays have included the audiences much more than formerly; actors come down the aisle, a man from the second row shoots the leading man on the stage—that's an idea which, I feel, has not fully been developed—the audience is made the jury of a play, as in *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, and all sorts of innovations which I don't suppose are innovations at all.

But to get back to the days of the week. I have heard stars say they would like to play a week of Wednesday matinées, for they consist mostly of women, and women, though they may not possess horny hands with which to make loud applause, are very quick and volatile in their reactions to plays; they are good weepers too.

Wednesday nights are also usually increasingly better. But on Thursday, although it is nearer the pleasant valley, there is almost always a drop in attendance and in responsiveness. In my own mental picture of that day things are tinged slightly with a kind of grayness, and I find no reason to alter the picture as far as the theater is concerned. The why of it may be that Thursday is maids' day out

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all over the country, and those who go to a play on that night are either reminded of the servant problem, or a cold dinner, or restaurant food, or that they left the dishes to be done when they get home, and bring with them into the theater a kind of depression. And the reason for the drop in attendance is that there are those who can't go and leave the children alone with no one in the house, or are too tired after cooking to bother about seeing a show. I speak as if it were the feminine giant which is the determining factor as to whether or not to go to a play. And as a matter of fact, she is, just as she is the one who buys the books or goes to lectures. Publishers, managers and lecture bureaus know that if they catch the women they have caught success.

Of course, New York theaters draw heavily from transients, who aren't worried much about such homely details, so there isn't a terrific amount of falling off in attendance; nevertheless, a drop in the receipts is always to be expected on a Thursday. Again I say, unless the play is a smash; then all signs fail, just as they do in a complete failure. It is all very mysterious.

But when we come to Friday the gala spirit begins to show, and I must say Friday-night houses are the most pleasant to play to. The week is almost over, the week-end has begun, Saturday is a half holiday and all sorts of plans are in the air. You might think one would prefer the Saturday matinée crowd, or the Saturday night, but I

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assure you, for some reason or other the Friday nights are the nicest. The Saturday houses may be the largest in size, but they are not always the best, for then you get more of the working people, who are free from the bonds of the office and ready for a good time. These in predominance are likely to cause laughter when there should be silence, and giggles when there should be tears. Time and again I have had to come up against that phenomenon only to realize that I was not being gayed by such reactions, but that it meant they were moved in some way, no matter what their expression of that emotion might be. To people of certain mental caliber the laugh is the first channel through which to express emotion; when the emotion becomes too strong for the laugh to carry it off, tears come. That is why the gallery giggles during love scenes or exclaims at a kiss, as I have heard them, “Oh, boy!” This was, of course, intended to make the spectators laugh and in the general relief to allow the one who did the exclaiming some sort of let-up of embarrassment too.

During the war the Saturday houses were composed of an entirely new set of people—from what had been the rule before, that is. We would look out into the house and see in the front rows, not the evening clothes we had been accustomed to, but rows of strange-looking, fat women with shawls, such as you can see in the Subway, wearing no hats, and their children—folks who had never

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been inside a real theater before, who had been educated on the movies and now had money enough to go to a regular show. I say "regular show" with misgiving, for if they were anything like the grocery boy to whom my mother gave some seats to a play once, they must have thought the whole thing mighty queer. I remember, she was anxious to hear the boy's report of the play and so made it a point to be in the kitchen when he called for his order next day.

"What did you think of the play?" she asked.

"Oh, it was all right, I guess. Only it wasn't like a regular show; they had speaking in it," he answered.

During that time, as in all wartimes, the theater prospered tremendously; anything went; they used to say even a dog show would make money. But the Saturday performances were played with enormous lack of enthusiasm from the front of the house, principally because, I imagine, those newcomers to theaterdom were a little afraid of laughing in the wrong places and exposing their lack of familiarity with what might be *au fait*. It was the same thing which made a man next to my father at *The Tavern* one night call the usher to say that he was being annoyed by this person who was laughing at a serious play—for my father had discovered about an act ahead of the man that this was a magnificent spoof—and when the whole audience finally tumbled to Mr. Cohan's joke and found out that phrase, "What's all the shooting for?" was sup-

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posed to be funny, the man got up in fury and changed his seat.

Don't think such as these comprised every audience during the war, for none of us who played to the rows and rows of boys in from camp, on their way across, or back from France, as those in the Navy so often were, can ever forget the joy of their quickness in response or the zest with which they received our poor efforts. They used to tell me at the canteens that the requests for seats for their last night before going overseas were always Al Jolson first and *Maytime* next, and since I was playing in *Maytime* I felt more than honored.

About this time there was one of those gala performances at the opera—a matinée of *Aïda* given for the benefit of some war charity, which I attended along with several thousand others—but I figure I got more of my money's worth that afternoon than anybody, for next to me was one of those newcomers to the theater. Before the great gold curtains of the Metropolitan parted for the first act she began to read aloud to her mother the argument of the opera from the libretto she had bought outside, but she didn't get far enough to be of much help to herself or her mother when the house darkened and the music began.

About a third of the way through the first scene she leaned over to me and whispered, "Would you please be so kind as to tell me which is Ayder?" I did so, and she was silent until the lights went up again, when she quickly

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began to read aloud to catch up from where she left off. From her lips I learned that Ayder was the captive daughter of a king called Ammonio—Amonasro—and was kept as a slave to the Egyptian princess; that they were both crazy about the tenor called Randoms—Rhadames—and that Ayder was the one he liked, but the princess was awful jealous.

The Nile scene was about to go on, and she explained to her mother that it said in the book, "Extryordinary of the Temple of Iz-iz." Rhadames proved traitor to his trust, Amneris and the High Priest caught him, Aïda and her father made their escape and Rhadames was condemned to be buried alive in a tomb where he finds Aïda has crept to die with him, and as the final strains of their tragic end, "O terra addio!" spun themselves out in ecstasy and the lovers died, suffocated by the fetid air in the tomb, my friend to my right closed her libretto, saying brightly, "Well, anyway, Ayder gets him," and went back to Bridgeport, whence, she told me, she had come for the show.

There is an exception to the rule of Saturdays during the summer; most everybody goes out of town for the week-end then and Saturday takes the place of Monday during the regular run as far as receipts are concerned, and Monday takes the place of Saturday.

There is one kind of audience, however, which we have always with us, no matter what day of the week, no matter what the humidity, no matter what the degree of intelli-

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gence—the coughing audience. Winter or summer, spring or fall, the American public is eternally afflicted with lung trouble. They do say it is the climate; if so, those M. D.'s who take up the nose-and-throat specialty are smart; I notice they all get rich. At any rate, there is seldom a night when the gamut from a hacking cough to the last stages of consumption is not run at our theaters. Cigarettes or nerves from our high-strung existence may be the cause, as well as the climate and soft-coal smoke. Whatever your pet explanation is, the fact remains that the theater is the cougher's happy hunting ground. People who ought to be home in bed with trained nurses and doctors come to the play—to get their minds off how they feel perhaps—and whoop heavily throughout the performance, to everyone's misery. People with catarrh clear their throats every few seconds and bark. People with cigarette coughs hack and start the whole house to going. One cough will do it, you know. Try it one night at the theater, and see if your one cough doesn't explode a whole chain of them, like firecrackers.

I don't mean that there aren't times when one must cough or die, but, conversely, no matter how bronchial an audience may be, if the situation in the play becomes extremely tense the coughing stops dead; and when the relief from that situation is reached it begins again. So, you see, it is not always so necessary to cough to keep from choking to death. It is because of that silence during

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a gripping scene that Alexander Woollcott, when he was dramatic critic, said, "The cough is dramatic criticism." And so it is. If the scene on the stage is not interesting or is not well played, the audience will be peppered with little cough explosions. But if the scene is arresting and done beautifully, the actors will be rewarded with rare stillness.

The cough is an awful loud noise, in case you hadn't thought of it that way. It can drown out anything else occurring simultaneously. Haven't you noticed that you often miss the lines of the play when someone has coughed during the speech? And with what dexterity and uncanny insight the coughers find just the word to cough on! It is always the point of the remark, the nub of the sentence, the one word which is the key to it all, or the gag. Sometimes I think it is a gift—this coughing at the wrong place. One night I felt as if I was threading my way among the rocks and shallows of active influenza, and my whole being turned into one single resolve: To stop that coughing if I never did another thing. I did it, but I don't think it helped my performance much.

Actors can sense a cough coming; time and again I have seen and heard them dodge what would cause the best laugh in the piece to be lost upon the germ-laden air, wait till the cougher had got through before proceeding with the play.

People are thoughtless about that, you know; and though

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they would think it extremely rude to yell during a play, yet without a moment's hesitation they make a noise which is equally loud. I once heard a man back of me at a Galli-Curci concert who chose the moment of a high pianissimo tone which was floating out over us all to emit one of those wheezing, choking, lengthy coughs, which he could have saved for a second or so if he had really tried. He not only broke the spell but the prima donna jumped as if she had been lashed. Of course the pianissimo tone was ruined.

They tell a story about John Barrymore when he was playing *Redemption* in New York some years ago, before a particularly croupy audience; when it came to the scene where he, as a derelict, was being questioned by the prefect of police and was asked if he couldn't say anything for himself, he waved his hand out toward the audience and cried, "Say anything! How can I with that bunch of trained seals out there?"

They also say that William Gillette, that veteran of the stage, repeats any line which may have been blurred by coughing, until there is no doubt that everyone in the theater has heard and understood him.

Since, then, this unnecessary evil is with us, why wouldn't it be a grand idea to give cough drops with every seat, whether bought at the cut-rates, the agencies or the box office? Or have the ushers hand them out with the programs? I'll bet the percentage of coughs would drop to

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one-half of one per cent in no time. There's a good charity for some millionaire to think of for his will, and would do as much to further art as a bequest to a museum, besides making the public "cough-conscious"!

Richard Bennett, when he opened in New York with a dramatization of Jim Tully's *Jarnegan*, began his famous curtain speeches between the acts, and one he gave on the première was to the effect that he would like to establish a school for audiences.

As a matter of fact, the public doesn't need to be told how to behave; its behavior is its own affair. It may be interested to know, as a psychiatrist might tell it, why it behaves as it does, but it is stupid to scold it. The relation between the human beings in the front of the footlights and those in back of them is mysterious and delicate. Let us try to understand it, try to see ourselves as others see us. And yet, I suppose, for all that, to the end of our days we shall eye each other across that flaming barrier and say, with a shake of the head: "Queer birds, actors." "Queer birds, audiences."

VI

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THE new baby out at the Infant Industry's house was viewed by the elder infant with about as much enthusiasm as most elder brothers bestow on the latest acquisition from the stork. So far it hasn't an official name and is designated mostly by the endearing pet names of Squawkie and Talkie; but there are such strange goings on about the new baby that the silent brother has cause for considerable thought. Never since he was born has he been so shoved off in the background or so humiliated by such transference of his parents' affections elsewhere; moreover, he has had to suffer the ignominy of being forced to "mind the baby" while they went out to advertise the new offspring to a gaping world. Indeed, he has come to worry about the chances of reverse English which would give the estate to the younger son!

In other words, just as the banking business and Wall Street had decided that the moving-picture industry was something with bigger returns than almost anything but the steel business and was handling picture concerns in a big way, along come talking pictures and upset the molasses jug. Huge plants, with all the modern equipment,

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suddenly became elephants of an albino character unless they could be converted into sound factories, reproducing and synchronizing the human voice and all other noises. Magnates began to scurry, directors, authors and actors ran in all directions, while in moved quietly a new group of radio experts, sound technicians, mixers, and what-nots, to take possession of the new field. The talking moving picture seems here to stay, the elder brother and his friends who prefer the silent kind notwithstanding.

Felt is being bought by the ton to tack up on all the walls of the great buildings called "stages" where once all our favorite actors laughed noiselessly and wept to the sound of a cabinet organ and a violin playing soft music just outside the line of the camera—felt to deaden all reverberations which the microphone might pick up. Cameras are being boxed in steel and wood soundproof armor to keep the sound of the motor out of the reproduction; carpenters are learning that when the whistle blows for silence they are not to give that extra tap of the hammer or strike a match for a smoke while waiting for actors to do their scenes; managers of theaters are calling on bands of electricians to wire their houses for the new miracle; directors are learning how not to direct in the old way of "move to your right a little" during the progress of the scene; and strange young men are walking up to the hanging microphone just before the scene begins, to say: "One, two, three, four, four, eleven, forty-four; one,

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two, three, four, five, six, sixty-six, sixty-seven. Fifty-fifty, Mississippi. . . . How's it sound, George? . . . One, two, three, four—" until the buzzer from the recording room far from the stage grunts twice to say "O. K.," whereupon he informs the troupe they can go ahead.

It is all very disturbing—disturbing to all branches of the business, from the banking end to the extra who hopes to be a star. But when *Variety*, the actor's Bible, began to run scare heads such as "Film Stars in Panic," "Flicker Careers Ruined by Sound," "Legits in Demand," "Foreign Stars 30 Per Cent Flops," the nonpicture actors of America slid anticipatory tongues over their lips and wondered if this might not be their meat. For once the breaks might be with the actor, and he set about making the most of his chances. Too often had he been told his eyes were too light or his nose too long for pictures. Now, here was his opportunity to crash through with what he was really equipped to do—talk and act. Heretofore the ability to project emotion with the voice had been useless; dark brown eyes and plenty of crisp curly hair were worth many thousands a week more, but how—well, no longer would he be told: "Ah, yes, but this is another art. What goes on the stage does not necessarily go here in the movies." No, now they really didn't know what would go, and at least he would have the advantage of knowing how to say lines.

Whereupon the legitimate and musical comedy and

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vaudeville actors saw to it that they were seen and heard by directors and managers of the concerns who were already pioneering in the talking pictures, got tests made of themselves, trekked to California with and without jobs, and began the storming of the studios. The managers had already begun to turn toward the stage in their search for those who were accustomed to the sound of their own voices, and soon every train to Hollywood carried its load of Thespians; and up and down the land "*wo die Citronen blühen*" is heard the cry of surprise: "Well, for heaven's sake, when did you get here?" from Eastern actors greeting their kind.

I saw in Hollywood, in three weeks, more stage actors I knew than I would ordinarily see in New York in three years. Character actors, leading men, stars, ingénue comics, hoofers, whispering tenors and mammy singers, all, all, are here, the old familiar faces. The sun is out most of the time; the flowers are blooming—a little insanely, perhaps, for who ever heard of irises and roses and gaillardias blossoming at the same time? The ice-cream pants are home from the cleaners, and tennis dresses appear. All together, the thing has a gala flavor, in spite of the farm-hand hours—up and out with the sun, home and to bed with the dark. Small wonder, then, that after warm greetings the next sentence is: "How do you like it?" and the inevitable answer: "Fine!"

A young woman from one of the big motion-picture

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magazines came to interview me one day on the subject, "Broadway Looks at Hollywood," or maybe it was "Broadway Comes to Hollywood." Anyway, the idea was to ask me, among others, what we thought of all the stage people flocking West, and what we thought of the West when we got there. You see, then, that the migration is so definite as to be one of news value. To quote *Variety* once more, it has made a dearth of available actors.

This "Broadway Comes to Hollywood" interview was an opportunity to express from our angle what the regular moving-picture actor probably does not realize, and that is that Broadway has come to Hollywood quaking in its boots. For all their experience, these same Broadwayites are really petrified. Though they may have had years of saying lines back of the footlights, that protective as well as illuminating barrier, here they know they will have to perform before a cylinder hanging within a few inches of their heads and knowing that at the other end of the wire running from that microphone sits a deity called the mixer, up in his little room, listening with appalling coldness to their histrionic efforts. It is a little as if the actor was sitting in the lap of the audience; his slightest whisper will be heard distinctly by those in the back row, as well as his loudest roar. And not only has he to bother with one microphone; he finds, as like as not, that there will be three—one to catch the scene over

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by the fireplace, one to catch the scene by the window, and one over the door to pick up his entrance line. This is frightening, for, ordinarily, actors are accustomed to direct their lines toward the audience, even when facing another actor on the stage, and they immediately have to unlearn all they ever knew about the projection of the speaking voice.

Then the actor is worried about the irrevocability of what he is doing—the thought that every move is being photographed and recorded for all time then and there. No matter how rotten he may think it is, there is never a chance to say to himself, “There’s a line you can do better tomorrow night, my lad,” or, “There’s a laugh I never knew was there. I’ll keep it in.” To begin with, in this new medium the actor from Broadway has to learn how to put a make-up on all over again—a totally different kind of make-up, put on with water, of all things. And he has to learn to put on that combination of water and grease paint—which, by the way, doesn’t come in the form of a stick, but is squeezed from a tube—with about seven times the care he used with a stage make-up, for every tiny mistake will be picked up by the camera tenfold. And after it is on he must remember never to blow his nose under any circumstances, for the handkerchief would take off the paint, and there is no patching one of those movie make-ups; it has to be removed and another one put on. One of the actresses in the picture with me kissed me dur-

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ing a scene, and where her lip rouge touched my face there was left a long smudge, which meant back to my dressing room and three-quarters of an hour's work putting on a new face.

Another terrifying thing is this new atmosphere of dead silence. Approximate silence is achieved in the theater during the play, but really it is amazing how much noise there is offstage which is not heard at all by the audience. Although I will say I have been in shows where you couldn't hear yourself say your lines for the racket the chorus girls made offstage. I remember George Cohan once turning his back on me, and furiously yelling toward the wings, "You're making more noise off there than we are on the stage! Shut up!" Such a thing would be simply impossible in the making of talking pictures. These little black cylinders with an adjustable slide at the business end, nearest you, are so delicate that they pick up the ringing in your ears. Douglas Shearer, the recording engineer, wrote on the tablecloth at luncheon, the other midnight in the studio, that the amount of electric energy transmitted from the microphone was .000,000,000,17 of an ampere.

I suspect he wrote down the figures because he didn't know any more than we whether to say seventeen billionths or seventeen millionths; at any rate, the argument caused by these figures made us lose sight of the amazing fact, and whether it was millionths or billionths doesn't make

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much difference to the lay mind; anything over three zeros is impressive enough of the sensitiveness of the microphone. They ought to explain that to all those Eastern recruits, so that they can understand the reason for the threat of annihilation if somebody even champs too hard on his gum while a sound shot is being taken. They would understand why, when the boy who tests the mike just before the actors begin, by chanting his rigmarole about "Fifty, fifty, Mississippi. Who's your Aunt Minnie? One, two, three, four, five, six. 'Sixty-six," and the buzzer from the mixer says, "O. K."—even the buzzers say it in Hollywood, I must add, for no one ever answers "Yes," or "All right" or "It's fixed" or "It will be fixed"; it is always "O. K." or, better, "Ok," pronounced like "Oak"—and they have the interlock—two great doors to the outer world closed, a man blows a whistle outside in the road dividing the sound stages, so that no cars or trucks going from one part of the studio to the other may pass, for fear that their vibrations will disturb the mass of delicate wires going from that sound stage to the central recording room.

The stage itself is death-like; the boy at his switch-box sees a red light go on, which means that the cameras are running up to full speed; he nods to the director; the director nods to the actor with the first line or presses a button which will flash a light to give the actor his cue to enter.

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And just about that time, when everything is breathless and the actors as nervous as on a first night, the film in one of the cameras buckles or the recording machine goes hay wire, as they say on the West Coast, or a light valve, that tiny filament, quits and calls it a day, or somebody sneezes, or the mixer telephones he hears camera noise—that is, the noise of the motors working the shutters of the four or five cameras shooting the scene at the same time—or the actor himself is so hot and bothered with all the things he has to think of, such as raising his voice for this mike and lowering it for that, that he forgets what he has to say. Then the director says, "Take it over again," and the whistle blows outside, the traffic moves, the great doors unlock, the cameras are unhitched from the motors, opened, and the assistant cameraman notches the film so that the developers will know what has happened, then stands in front of the lens while they refocus, and one cameraman has a new idea for a light. Then the cameras are closed up once more, the boy at the switchboard asks the recording room for interlock, the great doors are shut, the whistle blows, the traffic ceases, the actors clear their throats for the last time, the young chap says his rigmarole, the buzzer buzzes, the director nods, the actor begins, and, if you're lucky, it goes through to the finish. If not, the performance begins again as I have described. And when this goes on for every scene, every day or every night, you get what I mean when I say that to the stage

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actor it seems like a never-ending dress rehearsal. You begin to wonder when you will ever get going, when you are going really to play the scene with sweep and phrasing.

At a stage dress rehearsal you go through the process of assembling the things you have rehearsed in bits and never expect to attain at that rehearsal the added thing which comes from the actual playing before an audience. At least, at a performance nothing short of an act of God can stop you from doing the whole play from the beginning to the bitter end. Now one thing about playing a play: If you are to have hysterics at the end of Act Two, along about the last half of it you can begin to gather yourself together for the big scene, and the playwright sees that you have a springboard for that scene. Not so in the talkies; there nothing but an act of God would let you finish what it was you were doing, and everything in the world conspires to halt and check you in your mad endeavor to get some phrasing and flow to your scene; and as for a springboard for your big scene, you shot that yesterday and you won't get to the climax till tomorrow. Now, you know that sort of thing is not conducive to peace of mind for the actor.

Of course he sees about him the familiar faces of property men, electricians, stage hands, and his guiding star, the director, just as he would see them in the theater; and, in a way, this enhances the dress-rehearsal hallucination to the extent that he is liable to do his work in just that



Culver Service

LON CHANEY GREETES PEGGY WOOD.
CLARENCE BROWN INTRODUCES THEM



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key—the rehearsal key—until that monitor in his own brain lashes out, “Here, wake up! This is it! This is no rehearsal; this is your one and only chance to do it!” and he, or in this case, I, try to make the top of the mountain in one leap, managing a pretty poor scramble at the best. But the dread of having to do emotional scenes to order, such as is asked of you in the movies, is certainly a definite thing in the minds of the Broadwayites with whom I have commiserated; and when I told them my tale of going on the set at nine and doing the most difficult emotional work of my life till nearly one, over and over again—for it was the silent part of the picture and they had to get long shots, medium shots and close-ups of my agony—my colleagues, as yet only in the mild beginning, or not yet started, looked at one another wide-eyed.

I pitied them, too, for they didn’t have the break I had, not only in a fine director, which was my good fortune, but in so simple, yet so important a thing as the music boy who ran the records to suit the scene. You see, it was the silent version and this boy would play records he thought appropriate to the dramatic action to help us with the mood. He was a quiet, unassuming lad, always being teased by the electricians and crew, always taking it good-naturedly, for he had no interest in the world but music. He couldn’t make it himself, so he spent every cent he could get hold of on records; he told me he had five thousand of them. And how truly he

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instinctively felt the music for the scene perhaps you can understand when I tell you that, from his own taste, he chose to play—when in the story this great concert pianist sat down to play to a simple young woman who had shown him the beauty of the dusk on the ocean from her windows—what do you think? Harold Bauer's record of the "Moonlight Sonata."

Another morning, when I had to come into the room where the body of my little boy was laid, I was standing outside the door wondering why the tears did not come and why I couldn't leap with one leap into the heart of the scene, when suddenly I heard coming from the corner where the music boy had hidden himself, the strains of a great orchestra playing the "Prelude" to *Parsifal*. The tears came fast enough then, partly for the great music itself, partly for the scene, and partly for the taste and understanding of that boy. I hope other stage actors may have him on the set, although what will become of him in the talking pictures, where of course no such musical accompaniment can be allowed, I don't know.

I hope he finds another niche as well suited to his talents as the one he has been in.

It used to be that the director, after rehearsing the scene to be shot in a silent movie, would call, "Lights! Music! Camera!" having spent, say, the better part of an hour to arrive at this crisis; but now, with the incandescent lamps used in the sound pictures burning from the time

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of the beginning of the set-up, with no undertone of music to color the scene and the cameras started silently, the whole aspect of the old movie studios is changed. Even the old-timers at it are having to learn new terms, and you can imagine what it means to a stage actor to come into a land where he is not only expected to get up at 6:30 A.M. and like it but also, when he gets to work, has to learn a new language, so as to know what is going on around him!

For instance, a set-up, such as I spoke of just now—I wonder if I hadn't better include a glossary here and now; it might save time and ink:

SET-UP. The arrangement of lights and cameras to photograph a scene. These are long and involved processes by which cameramen try to attain as much of a three-dimensional effect as possible in a two-dimensional medium. They are wonders at it too.

They can light a scene so it has depth and breadth, or make a person beautiful or ugly, or show the modeling of a mass, or focus the eye of the prospective audience to the important features of the scene, or almost anything you want. In this they are assisted with rare technical skill by juicers.

JUICER. An electrician. So called because he handles the juice.

GIMMICK. A strip of two or more lights which can be hung in a corner out of range of the camera, but which will light that corner.

RIFLE. Not an instrument of death but a huge incandescent lamp set in a deep reflector. They don't use Klieg lights any more since the advent of the talkies, for they make a lot

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of noise, nor do they use the mercury-tube lights which used to make you look like a badly embalmed corpse, for they banged like a cold radiator. All lights are incandescent bulbs of varying degrees of power.

GOBO. A gobo is an upright black panel about two feet wide, on a standard, and is used to shield the camera or some other object from too much light. Sort of a horse blinder. On sound stages they are made of black cloth; the old ones of board are too liable to ricochet the sound vibrations.

BUNGALOW. The steel and wood soundproof armor around the camera on a tripod.

BOOTH. A contraption like the ice box in the back of the butcher shop, with a clear glass window, where, instead of legs of lamb, there are one or two cameras, not in bungalows, but *au naturel*. This is completely soundproof.

OVERCOAT. A padding of felt and cloth to keep out the camera noise from the supposedly soundproof bungalows.

PERAMBULATOR. A device on rubber wheels, to make cameramen, actors and all concerned curse the Germans who invented and used it first in *The Last Laugh*. It is really a platform on wheels upon which is set the camera, which can then follow an actor no matter where he moves in the scene. It can run up to a close-up from a long shot without a new set-up.

WILD WALLS. A wild wall is one which doesn't really belong to the stage setting, but can be shifted around to accommodate a camera angle which might run past the end of the existing scenery. It is also handy to put in when some mirror is in the shot, in case the mirror is reflecting something that doesn't belong in the picture.

PRACTICAL. A practical is anything that works. For instance, if there should be a lamp on the table and at some time during the picture it must be lighted by an actor, it is called a practical. Anything that isn't fake is a practical.

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PLAYBACK. A playback is exactly what the name indicates—a wax which is played back over the loud-speaker immediately after the scene, to show how it sounded. I believe that in some studios they have discontinued doing this, for so many of the moving-picture actors were upset by the sound of their own voices. They say Clara Bow wept bitterly when she first heard herself speak. But as for me, it is the greatest lesson in the world. I recall Galli-Curci's once saying that the finest singing teacher she ever had was the talking machine, and playbacks are no more than the wax records of one's singing and speaking voice.

Roland Young said that he thought the greatest stunt in the world would be to make a record of a dress rehearsal of a stage play and play it back to the actors, act by act; it would be better than all the corrective notes in the world from those sitting in front of the footlights. In the talking movies, two wax records are made simultaneously, as well as a film record, so that if one goes wrong the other won't. One of the records is played back immediately after the conclusion of the take, then destroyed, and the other is sent off to be processed into a regular phonograph record. The film sound track is developed and shown in the sound projection room.

In the case of a song I sang in my picture, the playbacks were excellent, but when the sound track was shown it sounded fuzzy and queer. They made an investigation and discovered that the recording machines had got out of whack and the film stuff was no good. However, they

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still had the good wax, which was on its way to the laboratory to be made into a master record, and said I shouldn't have to sing the thing over again. I was glad, for I had sung that at 4:30 in the morning—we were on the graveyard shift, making the talking version, and worked from seven P.M. to seven A.M.—and achieved what I thought was pretty good sound, but I firmly believe I could never do it again, especially at that hour.

MIXER. The mixer is a new term and a new face in the studios. He sits in a room placed about halfway up the height of the sound stage and looks out of a bay window, made of two thicknesses of glass, with an air well between, watching the scene as it progresses, twirling knobs and keeping one eye on the compasslike needle in front of him, which shows the fluctuations of the sound as the actors talk or the music plays or whatever. A loud-speaker in the room gives him about the comparative volume of the voices as they would sound in a theater. He can so twist knobs that if a sudden rise in pitch is required it will not blast the microphone, or if a whisper is necessary, he can key the recording to it. Of course, he has to know the scene, see it rehearsed, hear it spoken, both down on the stage and later through the mike, when he sits up in the monitor room—as it is called. He must know to the second what to expect and anticipate it.

Most of the mixers come from the radio business or from the great electric companies who are responsible for

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the talking pictures. You can see why they are called mixers, because they combine the recording with the pictorial action. They are gods in a way; they can make or break us—the scene, the picture, or the director—by toning the recording too high or too low. And besides, when the mixer is all through, and the picture cut and finished, there is still another mixer at the theater where the picture is shown, who also has the power of the high, the low and the middle justice, for he can twirl knobs, too, and make the actors roar or mouth as he chooses.

This business of tuning the mike is hard on the actors sometimes, for if there should be a scene where one person must play in a high key while the other must barely make an answer, we are up against a technical difficulty which may be solved, but certainly is not now. The microphone cannot be tuned to both levels of voice without losing one entirely or making the loud one so loud it is silly. So the actors have to bring the pitches of their voices nearer together, whether it is dramatically true or not. One will have to raise his voice and the other lower his until some sort of recording level can be reached.

I suppose I had better not be so final in my statement of what the microphone can or cannot do, for by the time this appears that little impediment to the marriage of true minds may have been removed. Perhaps by next week new gadgets will have been invented to make this infant obstacleproof. Certainly we have learned in the past three

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or four years that nothing is impossible, and when we hear the sound engineers laugh deprecatingly at their efforts of two months ago, we are face to face with that new element in the entertainment business—science. Salesmen and efficiency men we have heard of before in show business, but this invasion of physicists and scientists is, as Montague Glass says, something else again.

Some years ago I remember visiting Colonel Fabian, who has a research laboratory at Geneva, Illinois, for his own amusement, and seeing there his experiments with soundproof plasters. He had one room plastered in the ordinary way—a large room with a fairly low ceiling—and when I spoke or sang in that room, I was deafened by the reverberations. Next to this room he had the exact replica of the first room, but plastered with some of the experimental plaster, and when I spoke or sang there, the result was perfectly normal—that is, there were no echoes and no reverberations. I recall thinking at the time that that was a fairly silly way to spend a fortune—to fool with plaster. Suddenly, the other day, I thought about that plaster and asked our mixer what he knew about it.

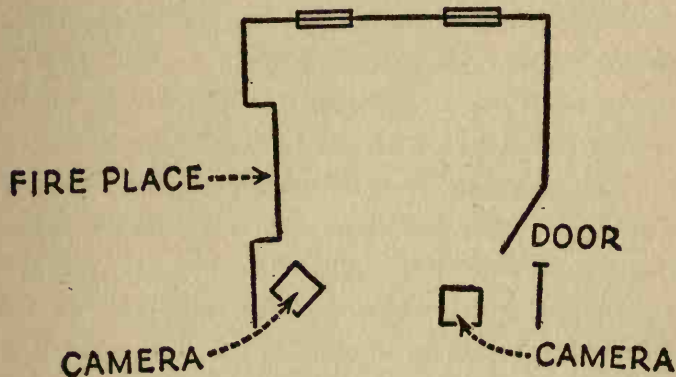
“We’re using Colonel Fabian’s stuff right here,” he said—I was most interested, naturally—“but it doesn’t help us much on this particular set. In fact, we had a lot of difficulty with that plaster because of our set being three-sided, which made the sound ricochet back and forth. If

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the walls had been cloth, we'd have been better off, but of course we had to match a silent shot with plastered walls."

He was right. We had much less difficulty when our walls were a cotton cloth painted to look like tinted walls. That cloth was stretched taut over frames; pictures were hung by placing a batten in back for the hooks to screw into, and where it was absolutely necessary to have something solid under the cloth, that solidity was modified by boring hundreds of inch and two-inch holes all over the wooden backing to let the sound go through rather than be reflected.

All sets on sound stages are made as far as possible with two walls, leaving as much open space as can be had. For instance, if a room is built like this—



the sound engineer would have the crew take out either the right or left hand wall and arrange the camera angles

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so that they would not show the absence. And as for the time they would take to do this, let me assure you that abracadabra would be about half said and the trick would be finished.

That is one of the astoundingly efficient things about the movies. If you want a wall removed or a piece of two-by-six to make a new boom for the microphone to hang on, somebody says so and the answer is, "Coming up!" While you wonder at it, it is done. Property men produce thread, extra pieces of roast chicken, waxed paper, plates, unused napkins, tobacco, rabbits, toothbrushes—everything and anything—at a moment's notice. I never saw anything like it. Nobody says, "Oh, that's way up in the property shop. Let it go," but "Wait a sec. I'll have it down here in a minute."

We had to do a scene in a German railway carriage in *Wonder of Women* where I opened a tea basket full of food. Of course, since it was in the silent part of the picture, it had to be done over and over again with fresh pretzels, fresh beer, fresh cucumber salad—which, by the way, was so unappetizingly made by our own commissary that the director, Clarence Brown, sent clear to the best restaurant in Hollywood to get some—and never did the property man have to be told that now was the time to change the half-used stuff for fresh. While the scene was going on, he was washing cups and plates and tumblers to have them ready for the next shot. Just before every

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scene in the picture, he would see that no dust or dirt was on the carpet, and wipe the footprints of the juicers and grips and others from the polished floors with his oiled mop. He wasn't going to have any retakes because of his department. Nothing was too much trouble. When I think of the stage crew who told Winthrop Ames, after the dress rehearsal of *Escape*, in New York, that he'd have to get another crew, the show was too hard work, and forced him to open in New York the next night with a green crew, it makes me wish they could see the conscientiousness of some of the picture crews.

In the early days of the picture business they hadn't learned to be as foresighted as they are nowadays, nor had they had the time to accumulate all the bits and pieces of property which now are so numerous as to have to be catalogued. Lewis Stone was telling me the other day that when he first started out with the Biograph in New York, there was one time when they needed an ash tray.

"There seemed to be some reason in the plot why I had to have an ash tray on which to leave my cigar, and when we were half-way through the scene somebody discovered that there was no tray on the table. Not only was there none on the table, in all the Biograph studio there was none. Do you know what they did? Sent a one-ton truck all the way to a department store for an ash tray!

"But the prize story of that kind belongs to another

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Biograph opus." He chuckled. "We were all set to do a scene supposedly at the home of some swell, where a weekend party was in progress. We were to sit around a fake swimming pool in fancy bath-ropes and look distinguished, but bored. Well, that part seemed to suit the director, but he wanted something extra for an added effect, and puzzled no little about what it should be. Finally he had a brilliant idea: He decided that it would be the swankiest kind of swank for us to fish in the swimming pool and catch trout for our breakfast—our supposed breakfasts. So, the next thing, two men were dispatched for the trout. Two men, a truck, some barrels and fishing tackle. Well, it appeared that there were no trout near New York City and it took two days for the men to drive one hundred sixty-four miles for them and the one hundred sixty-four miles back, besides the time for catching the trout. However, catch them they did, and they came back with the fish in the barrels. They weren't any too happy in those barrels, somehow, but someone had the bright idea that, of course, since they were brook trout they needed running water. That was a poser, for you couldn't buy running water at a department store.

"However, the germ of ingenuity was even then beginning to function in the property department.

"They decided to fill the bathtub—there was one at the studio—then pull the plug and let the water run in from

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the tap, just enough to keep an even amount in the tub. That seemed to be correct, for the fish revived and everybody went home, planning to start the scene next morning. But they forgot to tell the watchman, who heard the water running and carefully turned off the tap. Next morning, of course, the fish were dead, and the big fishing scene was once more postponed, while the two men went back to their source of supply for two days and more fish. This time the watchman was warned, and the fish were very chipper as they were poured into the artificial swimming pool. That is, they were chipper for twenty minutes. Then they died very dead, for somebody had thought he'd line that pool with creosote, so that it wouldn't leak, and that was the end of that batch of trout.

"By this time the overhead on those fish was so terrific that the director ordered the property man to get some wooden fish, and we angled for them with heavy sinkers, so that they wouldn't all float on the surface of the pool. I remember one actor, standing on the edge of the pool, who whipped out his fish—on cue—with such force that the sinker hit him in the back of the head and knocked him out cold. He fell in the water and nearly drowned. After that, we gave up the whole idea of fishing as impractical."

Those days have gone, and now each studio has a building department, a tin shop, a forge, and a charge account with the zoo. If you want anything, just call the

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slaves of the lamp and there it is, presto. No long-distance fishing jaunts these days.

Ingenuity, however, is still needed, no matter what the degree of efficiency developed by more businesslike methods of the modern movies, and I'll bet a hat it was somebody in the prop department who solved the difficulty of the rattling of newspapers and the hailstorm which the opening of a letter caused on the microphone by suggesting that the paper and the letter be dampened. I may be wrong; it might have been one of the sound experts, or an electrician, or the director, but I have a hunch it was a property man. It might have been props, too, or maybe the wardrobe department, which, or who, fixed the business about Norma Shearer's taffeta dress in *The Last of Mrs. Cheney*. Miss Shearer had worn a lovely creation in the silent version, and, naturally, put it on for the same scene in the talking version, only to throw consternation into the recording room; the silk made so much noise swishing they couldn't hear the actors! And it wasn't until somebody suggested putting layers of flannel underneath the bouffant skirt to keep the silk from rubbing on silk that the picture was able to go on.

Silk isn't the only thing to make things difficult either. I recall, one night we were working on a converted sound stage—that is, an old silent-movie stage—which was, of course, not entirely soundproof, and hurrying to beat the daylight—which was due in a half hour—not only for the

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disastrous effect that would have, coming through the glass roof into our supposedly midnight scene, but we knew the birds would begin with the first thought of dawn and chirp merrily with no idea of microphones or how delicate they were, how sensitive to the slightest sound. I think the last time we shot that scene it was a battle between the actors and the birds as to which should be heard!

King Vidor told me that in one of the scenes he tried to take out-of-doors on the lot, in his all-negro picture *Hallelujah*, he spent the afternoon dodging airplanes for the mikes and clouds for the cameras. When the sun was out, so were the aviators, and when the aviators disappeared, so did the sun. After that the studio decided to send up a silver balloon whenever sound pictures were being shot and made a request that airplanes fly twenty-five hundred feet above the balloon or twenty-five hundred feet to one side.

And yet, I suppose, about a week from next Tuesday somebody will invent something which will make the microphone immune from every noise but the voice it is supposed to pick up, and neither director, actor, nor the prop shop will be deterred by mechanical difficulties.

However, it isn't altogether mechanical things which are affecting some directors these days; certainly, the man who asked Roland Young, during the rehearsal of a scene, if the singular of "alibi" ought not to be "alibus" was more concerned with erudition than light valves. He was the

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same gentleman who, when seen in riding clothes at the studio by an actor new to Hollywood, and asked innocently by that actor if he had been riding, replied, "Well, no, not exactly. You see, I'm funny that way. I like to wear a different suit every day, and when I have come to the end of my wardrobe, I wear my riding clothes."

There are very few stories yet of the talking pictures; it is still too new for anything beyond technical jokes, but there is one tale, probably apocryphal, about one of the officers of a motion-picture company, sitting in a projection room listening to a rush—that is, seeing and hearing the scenes taken the day before. He said nothing until the thing was over and the lights went up, and then he turned to the director.

"That last scene vill have to be retaken," he announced.

"What's the matter with it?" asked the director, astonished.

"Diction."

"Diction? Why, I heard every word."

"Did you? Vell, I didn't. I didn't hear the final *k* in *svimmink*!"

Those final *k*'s and middle *t*'s in "often" are showing up these days, when every blemish of speech is picked up and magnified to the sorrow of many actors. The rush for elocutionists is on, and these same elocutionists are coming out from behind whatever it is they have been doing since teaching the young idea *Mazeppa* with ges-

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tures went out of style, and thronging to Hollywood. *A, e, i, o, u* and sometimes *w* and *y* are being worked very hard these days.

One very prominent movie star had the wit to send for Laura Hope Crews to coach her in her first talkie. Someone, at a party given for Miss Crews when she arrived, was telling the guest of honor how marvelous this stage woman was supposed to be—not having a notion to whom she was talking.

"Yes," said she, "they tell me she's wonderful at teaching talking. I can't just remember her name, but I think it's Carrie Jacobs-Bond."

These stage names are all new to Hollywood; even so widely known a person as George Arliss was refused admittance to Warner Brothers, where he was making *The Green Goddess* and *Disraeli*, by a suspicious gateman. Ina Claire found herself waiting in an outer office while extra girls were admitted to the studio where Miss Claire is being paid fabulous sums to make pictures. She had to get the main executive of the studio to explain who she was and that she had a legitimate right to come and go as she pleased.

Elliott Nugent, the author of *Kempy* and *The Poor Nut*, was accosted by a special policeman on the lot where he was rehearsing and acting, and ordered to produce a pass. Of course, he had none, while his luncheon guests, George Abbott, of *Broadway* and *Coquette*, and Donald Mac-

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Donald, of *Strange Interlude*, were well armed with theirs. In vain he explained he was working there. The man consulted his lists and found no record of his name. It was only the threat to leave the lot and let the policeman do the explaining to Sam Wood, the director, who expected Nugent at rehearsal immediately, that grudgingly made the officer relent.

All legitimate actors—called so in all seriousness, mind you—are asked in all interviews to say what they think the talking picture will do to the stage—will it help or hasten its demise—and are expected to have some sort of answer on tap. I have felt a little foolish with my “I don’t know,” so I’ve shopped around in the public prints for what sounds to me like the best reply carrying the greatest authority, and have come to the conclusion that Winthrop Ames’ opinion makes the most sense.

He has contended for a long time that, far from hurting the legitimate theater, the movies have improved it by releasing it from the ten-twenty-three melodrama type of play, which now the movie can do so much better, and allowing it to turn to the better plays. He says the acting nowadays is superior to that of former years, and the general run of plays much higher in literary and artistic value. He welcomes the talking picture as a further development of his theory that the theater—that is, the drama spoken by living people before your eyes—can turn now to its real place in the arts, will become very, very

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good, very expensive, and in the main, like a symphony orchestra, will be only supported in the large towns. In other words, the theater is an art and will not exist long in the mold of a business, which is what it has been in this country and most of the rest of the world; sooner or later it will burst the mold and disaster will be upon us. Some say the real reason for bad seasons is that there are no good plays.

Mr. Sothern said, I am told, in his speech on Founder's Night at the Players Club, that good plays follow good actors and are usually written for them, asserting that actors these days have no time to learn their jobs; they make a hit in one play and play it for three seasons and are engaged as soon as possible for a part just like it. His father, he went on, played six hundred parts before he played Dundreary and he himself has played more than three hundred. What actor can say today he ever got so wide and instructive a schooling? You see, he contradicts Mr. Ames at the start by insinuating that the plays are not up to snuff and those who play in them are handicapped. Perhaps. But I am inclined to agree with the producer here, rather than with the actor; and may I add that if our plays aren't so good, the reason lies not in the lack of good actors, but in the fact that playwrights have been tempted to the silent and talking pictures and simply have not had the time to turn out more than their stint for the movies.

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Sidney Howard is now on the Coast, where he will probably stay for some time; Arthur Richman is working there on talking pictures; Charles McArthur and Ben Hecht, the authors of *The Front Page*, have signed on the dotted line; George Abbott is writing and directing pictures, and I could go along the list of practically every author of importance to the American theater and find they have almost all agreed to give considerable of their time to this new invention, and you will see that it will mean a dearth of plays from their pens for the next two seasons. Now is the chance for the unknown author to make his mark! Managers must have plays to fill their theaters and the legend that they never give a break to the man with his first play under his arm can be exploded.

Don't get the idea from all this that we of the stage feel we are the crusaders of art in the movies. On the contrary, we feel mighty humble-come-tumble, as Uncle Remus says, for it is bewildering, to say the least; from the change in working hours to the attitude of the script boy that every word in the script he holds is precious. I assure you, the boy on our set was most disturbed one day because I said "It's" instead of "It is." Truly. No, we are learning, along with the rest, that the best talking pictures are just that—moving-pictures with speeches in them which further the plot, get a laugh, or characterize, according to Professor Baker's three rules of what a line should do in a play. But first they are moving-pictures,

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not plays, and, I believe, are best made by those who understand moving-picture technic.

Perhaps the marriage of Ina Claire and John Gilbert is more symbolic of the talking pictures than we know. Gilbert came from a theatrical family to the screen, just as movies themselves did, and Miss Claire has reached the brilliant place of a star in the legitimate drama as well as in the musical-comedy field before that. The best that the screen has, then, combined with the best the stage can offer, will make the perfect talking picture. It won't be a stage play put directly on the screen, and it won't be a picture with noise effect; it will be something specially made for itself, combining and blending two technics. James Forbes said, in that old play of his, *The Show Shop*, that technic was something an actor worked all his life to get, and when he got it, nobody wanted it. That's about the place we have all got to, in the theater and in the movies; but in the process we perhaps have acquired the habit of learning. If so, we can keep on learning new things. We'll have to or sink; for who knows but that the next baby out at the Infant Industry's house won't be some device to project ourselves in the flesh to Siam or Lansing, Michigan, or both at the same time? "See, hear and touch" will probably be our next miracle, and when it arrives, I suppose there will still be long howls for what it will do to the theater. But somehow, I think the theater—that is, what we now call the legitimate theater—will survive; it

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has survived so much before now that even inventions cannot kill it. And to it every so often those who have ever had a taste of it will return, as Antæus to the earth, no matter what the lure of the new invention. It will always be the first love, which no new babies, no matter how charming or interesting, or successful, can supplant.

Still and all, this new baby is mighty cute!

(1)

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